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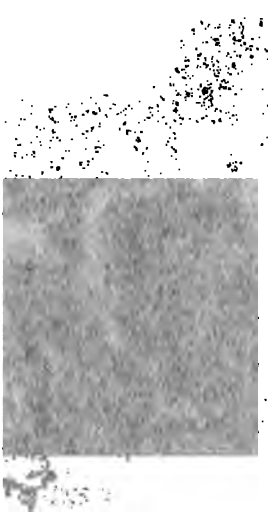

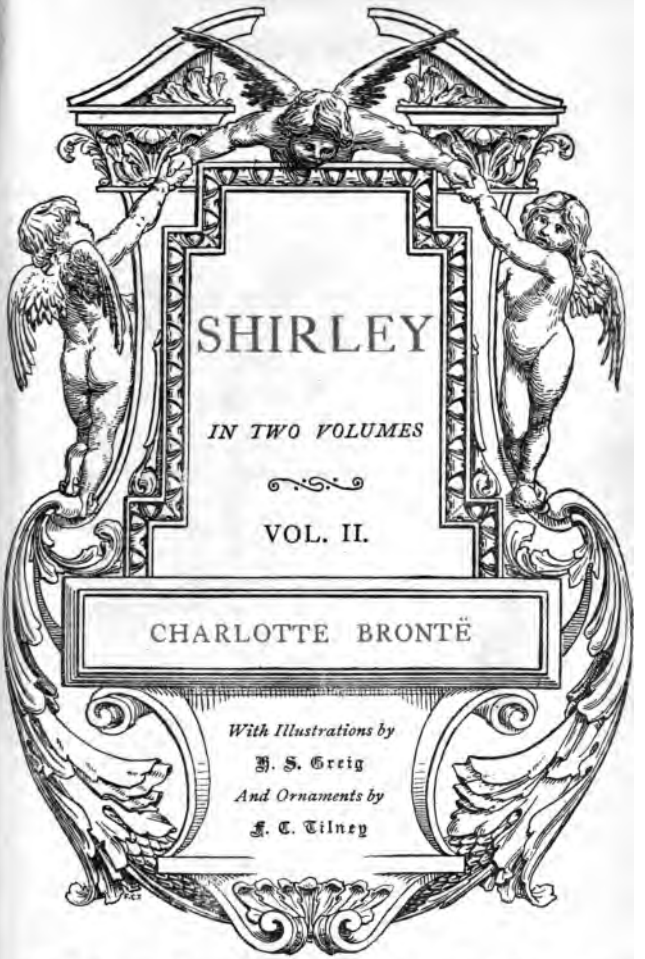

SHIRLEY

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

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SHIRLEY.

Chapter six.

A SUMMER NIGHT.

THE hour was now that of dusk. A clear air favoured the kindling of the stars.

"There will be just light enough to show me the way home," said Miss Keeldar, as she prepared to take leave of Caroline at the Rectory garden-door.

"You must not go alone, Shirley. Fanny shall accompany you."

"That she shall not. Of what need I be afraid in my own parish? I would walk from Fieldhead to the church any fine midsummer night, three hours later than this, for the mere pleasure of seeing the stars, and the chance of meeting a fairy."

"But just wait till the crowd is cleared away."

"Agreed. There are the five Misses Armitage streaming by. Here comes Mrs Sykes's phaeton, Mr Wynne's close carriage, Mrs Birtwhistle's car: I don't wish to go through the ceremony of bidding them all good-bye, so we will step into the garden and take shelter amongst the laburnums for an instant."

The rectors, their curates and their churchwardens, now issued from the church-porch. There was a great

confabulation, shaking of hands, congratulation on speeches, recommendation to be careful of the night air, &c. By degrees the throng dispersed; the carriages drove off. Miss Keeldar was just emerging from her flowery refuge, when Mr Helstone entered the garden and met her.

"Oh! I want you!" he said: "I was afraid you were already gone. Caroline, come here!"

Caroline came, expecting, as Shirley did, a lecture on not having been visible at church. Other subjects, however, occupied the Rector's mind.

"I shall not sleep at home to-night," he continued. "I have just met with an old friend, and promised to accompany him. I shall return probably about noon to-morrow. Thomas, the clerk, is engaged, and I cannot get him to sleep in the house, as I usually do when I am absent for a night; now"——

"Now," interrupted Shirley, "you want me as a gentleman—the first gentleman in Briarfield, in short, to supply your place, be master of the Rectory, and guardian of your niece and maids while you are away?"

"Exactly, Captain: I thought the post would suit you. Will you favour Caroline so far as to be her guest for one night? Will you stay here instead of going back to Fieldhead?"

"And what will Mrs Pryor do? She expects me home."

"I will send her word. Come, make up your mind to stay. It grows late; the dew falls heavily: you and Caroline will enjoy each other's society, I doubt not."

"I promise you then to stay with Caroline," replied Shirley. "As you say, we shall enjoy each other's society: we will not be separated to-night. Now, rejoin your old friend, and fear nothing for us."

"If there should chance to be any disturbance in the

night, Captain—if you should hear the picking of a lock, the cutting out of a pane of glass, a stealthy tread of steps about the house (and I need not fear to tell *you*, who bear a well-tempered, mettlesome heart under your girl's ribbon-sash, that such little incidents are very possible in the present time), what would you do?"

"Don't know—faint, perhaps—fall down, and have to be picked up again. But, doctor, if you assign me the post of honour, you must give me arms. What weapons are there in your stronghold?"

"You could not wield a sword?"

"No; I could manage the carving-knife better."

"You will find a good one in the dining-room sideboard: a lady's knife, light to handle, and as sharp-pointed as a poignard."

"It will suit Caroline; but you must give me a brace of pistols: I know you have pistols."

"I have two pairs; one pair I can place at your disposal. You will find them suspended over the mantelpiece of my study in cloth cases."

"Loaded?"

"Yes, but not on the cock. Cock them before you go to bed. It is paying you a great compliment, Captain, to lend you these; were you one of the awkward squad you should not have them."

"I will take care. You need delay no longer, Mr Helstone: you may go now. He is gracious to me to lend me his pistols," she remarked, as the rector passed out at the garden-gate. "But come, Lina," she continued; "let us go in and have some supper: I was too much vexed at tea with the vicinage of Mr Sam Wynne to be able to eat, and now I am really hungry."

Entering the house, they repaired to the darkened dining-room, through the open windows of which apartment stole the evening air, bearing the perfume of flowers from the garden, the very distant sound of far-

retreating steps from the road, and a soft vague murmur, whose origin Caroline explained by the remark, uttered as she stood listening at the casement—"Shirley, I hear the beck in the Hollow."

Then she rung the bell, asked for a candle and some bread and milk—Miss Keeldar's usual supper and her own. Fanny, when she brought in the tray, would have closed the windows and the shutters, but was requested to desist for the present: the twilight was too calm, its breath too balmy to be yet excluded. They took their meal in silence: Caroline rose once, to remove to the window-sill a glass of flowers which stood on the side-board; the exhalation from the blossoms being somewhat too powerful for the sultry room: in returning, she half opened a drawer, and took from it something that glittered clear and keen in her hand.

"You assigned this to me, then, Shirley—did you? It is bright, keen-edged, finely-tapered: it is dangerous-looking, I never yet felt the impulse which could move me to direct this against a fellow-creature. It is difficult to fancy what circumstances could nerve my arm to strike home with this long knife."

"I should hate to do it," replied Shirley; "but I think I could do it, if goaded by certain exigencies which I can imagine." And Miss Keeldar quietly sipped her glass of new milk, looking somewhat thoughtful, and a little pale: though, indeed, when did she not look pale? She was never florid.

The milk sipped and the bread eaten, Fanny was again summoned: she and Eliza were recommended to go to bed, which they were quite willing to do, being weary of the day's exertions, of much cutting of currant-buns, and filling of urns and teapots, and running backwards and forwards with trays. Erelong the maids' chamber-door was heard to close; Caroline took a candle, and went quietly all over the house, seeing that

every window was fast and every door barred. She did not even evade the haunted back-kitchen, nor the vault-like cellars. These visited, she returned.

"There is neither spirit nor flesh in the house at present," she said, "which should not be there. It is now near eleven o'clock, fully bed-time, yet I would rather sit up a little longer, if you do not object, Shirley. Here," she continued, "I have brought the brace of pistols from my uncle's study: you may examine them at your leisure."

She placed them on the table before her friend.

"Why would you rather sit up longer?" asked Miss Keeldar, taking up the firearms, examining them, and again laying them down.

"Because I have a strange excited feeling in my heart."

"So have I."

"Is this state of sleeplessness and restlessness caused by something electrical in the air, I wonder?"

"No: the sky is clear, the stars numberless: it is a fine night."

"But very still. I hear the water fret over its stony bed in Hollow's Copse as distinctly as if it ran below the churchyard wall."

"I am glad it is so still a night: a moaning wind or rushing rain would vex me to fever just now.

"Why, Shirley?"

"Because it would baffle my efforts to listen."

"Do you listen towards the Hollow?"

"Yes; it is the only quarter whence we can hear a sound just now."

"The only one, Shirley."

They both sat near the window, and both leaned their arms on the sill, and both inclined their heads towards the open lattice. They saw each other's young faces by the starlight, and that dim June twilight which

does not wholly fade from the west till dawn begins to break in the east.

"Mr Helstone thinks we have no idea which way he is gone," murmured Miss Keeldar, "nor on what errand, nor with what expectations, nor how prepared; but I guess much—do not you?"

"I guess something."

"All those gentlemen—your cousin Moore included—think that you and I are now asleep in our beds, unconscious."

"Caring nothing about them—hoping and fearing nothing for them," added Caroline.

Both kept silence for full half-an-hour. The night was silent, too; only the church-clock measured its course by quarters. Some words were interchanged about the chill of the air: they wrapped their scarves closer round them, resumed their bonnets which they had removed, and again watched.

Towards midnight the teasing, monotonous bark of the house-dog disturbed the quietude of their vigil. Caroline rose, and made her way noiselessly through the dark passages to the kitchen, intending to appease him with a piece of bread: she succeeded. On returning to the dining-room, she found it all dark, Miss Keeldar having extinguished the candle: the outline of her shape was visible near the still open window, leaning out. Miss Helstone asked no questions: she stole to her side. The dog recommenced barking furiously; suddenly he stopped, and seemed to listen. The occupants of the dining-room listened too, and not merely now to the flow of the mill-stream: there was a nearer, though a muffled sound on the road below the churchyard; a measured, beating, approaching sound; a dull tramp of marching feet.

It drew near. Those who listened by degrees comprehended its extent. It was not the tread of two, nor

of a dozen, nor of a score of men: it was the tread of hundreds. They could see nothing: the high shrubs of the garden formed a leafy screen between them and the road. To hear, however, was not enough; and this they felt as the troop trod forwards, and seemed actually passing the Rectory. They felt it more when a human voice—though that voice spoke but one word—broke the hush of the night.

"Halt."

A halt followed: the march was arrested. Then came a low conference, of which no word was distinguishable from the dining-room.

"We *must* hear this," said Shirley.

She turned, took her pistols from the table, silently passed out through the middle window of the dining-room, which was, in fact, a glass door, stole down the walk to the garden wall, and stood listening under the lilacs. Caroline would not have quitted the house had she been alone, but where Shirley went she would go. She glanced at the weapon on the side-board, but left it behind her, and presently stood at her friend's side. They dared not look over the wall, for fear of being seen: they were obliged to crouch behind it: they heard these words—

"It looks a rambling old building. Who lives in it besides the damned parson?"

"Only three women: his niece and two servants."

"Do you know where they sleep?"

"The lasses behind: the niece in a front room."

"And Helstone?"

"Yonder is his chamber. He uses burning a light: but I see none now."

"Where would you get in?"

"If I were ordered to do his job—and he desarves it—I'd try yond' long window: it opens to the dining-room: I could grope my way upstairs, and I know his chamber."

"How would you manage about the women-folk?"

"Let 'em alone except they shrieked, and then I'd soon quieten 'em. I could wish to find the old chap asleep: if he waked, h'd be dangerous."

"Has he arms?"

"Fire-arms, allus—and allus loadened."

"Then you're a fool to stop us here; a shot would give the alarm: Moore would be on us before we could turn round. We should miss our main object."

"You might go on, I tell you. I'd engage Helstone alone."

A pause. One of the party dropped some weapon, which rang on the stone causeway: at this sound the Rectory dog barked again furiously—fiercely.

"That spoils all!" said the voice; "he'll awake: a noise like that might rouse the dead. You did not say there was a dog. Damn you! Forward!"

Forward they went,—tramp, tramp,—with mustering manifold, slow-filing tread. They were gone.

Shirley stood erect; looked over the wall, along the road.

"Not a soul remains," she said.

She stood and mused. "Thank God!" was the next observation.

Caroline repeated the ejaculation, not in so steady a tone: she was trembling much; her heart was beating fast and thick: her face was cold; her forehead damp.

"Thank God for us!" she reiterated; "but what will happen elsewhere? They have passed us by that they may make sure of others."

"They have done well," returned Shirley with composure: "the others will defend themselves,—they can do it,—they are prepared for them: with us it is otherwise. My finger was on the trigger of this pistol. I was quite ready to give that man, if he had entered, such a greeting as he little calculated on; but behind

him followed three hundred: I had neither three hundred hands nor three hundred weapons. I could not have effectually protected either you, myself, or the two poor women asleep under that roof? therefore I again earnestly thank God for insult and peril escaped."

After a second pause, she continued—"What is it my duty and wisdom to do next? Not to stay here inactive, I am glad to say, but of course to walk over to the Hollow."

"To the Hollow, Shirley?"

"To the Hollow. Will you go with me?"

"Where those men are gone?"

"They have taken the highway: we should not encounter them: the road over the fields is as safe, silent, and solitary as a path through the air would be. Will you go?"

"Yes," was the answer, given mechanically, not because the speaker wished, or was prepared to go; or, indeed, was otherwise than scared at the prospect of going, but because she felt she could not abandon Shirley.

"Then we must fasten up these windows, and leave all as secure as we can behind us. Do you know what we are going for, Cary?"

"Yes—no—because you wish it."

"Is that all? And you are so obedient to a mere caprice of mine? What a docile wife you would make to a stern husband. The moon's face is not whiter than yours at this moment; and the aspen at the gate does not tremble more than your busy fingers; and so tractable and terror-struck, and dismayed and devoted, you would follow me into the thick of real danger! Cary, let me give your fidelity a motive: we are going for Moore's sake; to see if we can be of use to him: to make an effort to warn him of what is coming."

"To be sure! I am a blind, weak fool, and you

are acute and sensible, Shirley! I will go with you! I will gladly go with you!"

"I do not doubt it. You would die blindly and meekly for me, but you would intelligently and gladly die for Moore; but in truth there is no question of death to-night,—we run no risk at all."

Caroline rapidly closed shutter and lattice. "Do not fear that I shall not have breath to run as fast as you can possibly run, Shirley. Take my hand: let us go straight across the fields."

"But you cannot climb walls?"

"To-night I can."

"You are afraid of hedges, and the beck which we shall be forced to cross."

"I can cross it."

They started: they ran. Many a wall checked but did not baffle them. Shirley was sure-footed and agile: she could spring like a deer when she chose. Caroline, more timid, and less dexterous, fell once or twice, and bruised herself; but she rose again directly, saying she was not hurt. A quickset hedge bounded the last field: they lost time in seeking a gap in it: the aperture, when found, was narrow, but they worked their way through: the long hair, the tender skin, the silks and the muslins suffered; but what was chiefly regretted was the impediment this difficulty had caused to speed. On the other side they met the beck, flowing deep in a rough bed: at this point a narrow plank formed the only bridge across it. Shirley had trodden the plank successfully and fearlessly many a time before: Caroline had never yet dared to risk the transit.

"I will carry you across," said Miss Keeldar: "you are light, and I am not weak: let me try."

"If I fall in you may fish me out," was the answer, as a grateful squeeze compressed her hand. Caroline, without pausing, trod forward on the trembling plank as

if it were a continuation of the firm turf: Shirley, who followed, did not cross it more resolutely or safely. In their present humour, on their present errand, a strong and foaming channel would have been a barrier to neither. At the moment they were above the control either of fire or water: all Stilbro' Moor, alight and alow with bonfires, would not have stopped them, nor would Calder or Aire thundering in flood. Yet one sound made them pause. Scarce had they set foot on the solid opposite bank, when a shot split the air from the north. One second elapsed. Further off, burst a like note in the south. Within the space of three minutes, similar signals boomed in the east and west.

"I thought we were dead at the first explosion," observed Shirley, drawing a long breath. "I felt myself hit in the temples, and I concluded your heart was pierced; but the reiterated voice was an explanation: those are signals—it is their way—the attack must be near. We should have had wings: our feet have not borne us swiftly enough."

A portion of the copse was now to clear: when they emerged from it, the mill lay just below them: they could look down upon the buildings, the yard; they could see the road beyond. And the first glance in that direction told Shirley she was right in her conjecture: they were already too late to give warning: it had taken more time than they calculated on to overcome the various obstacles which embarrassed the short cut across the fields.

The road, which should have been white, was dark with a moving mass: the rioters were assembled in front of the closed yard gates, and a single figure stood within, apparently addressing them: the mill itself was perfectly black and still; there was neither life, light, nor motion around it.

"Surely he is prepared: surely that is not Moore meeting them alone?" whispered Shirley.

"It is—we must go to him! I *will* go to him."

"*That* you will not."

"Why did I come then? I came only for him. I shall join him."

"Fortunately, it is out of your power: there is no entrance to the yard."

"There *is* a small entrance at the back, besides the gates in front: it opens by a secret method which I know—I will try it."

"Not with my leave."

Miss Keeldar clasped her round the waist with both arms and held her back. "Not one step shall you stir," she went on authoritatively. "At this moment, Moore would be both shocked and embarrassed, if he saw either you or me. Men never want women near them in time of real danger."

"I would not trouble—I would help him," was the reply.

"How? By inspiring him with heroism? Pooh: These are not the days of chivalry: it is not a tilt at a tournament we are going to behold, but a struggle about money, and food, and life."

"It is natural that I should be at his side."

"As queen of his heart? His mill is his lady-love, Cary! Backed by his factory and his frames, he has all the encouragement he wants or can know. It is not for love or beauty, but for ledger and broadcloth, he is going to break a spear. Don't be sentimental; Robert is not so."

"I *could* help him—I *will* seek him."

"Off then—I let you go—seek Moore: you'll not find him."

She loosened her hold. Caroline sped like levelled shaft from bent bow; after her rang a jesting, gibing laugh. "Look well there is no mistake!" was the warning given.

But there *was* a mistake. Miss Helstone paused, hesitated, gazed. The figure had suddenly retreated from the gate, and was running back hastily to the mill.

"Make haste, Lina!" cried Shirley: "meet him before he enters."

"Caroline slowly returned. "It is not Robert," she said: "it has neither his height, form, nor bearing."

"I saw it was not Robert when I let you go. How could you imagine it? It is a shabby little figure of a private soldier: they have posted him as sentinel. He is safe in the mill now: I saw the door open and admit him. My mind grows easier; Robert is prepared: our warning would have been superfluous, and now I am thankful we came too late to give it: it has saved us the trouble of a scene. How fine to have entered the counting-house 'toute éperdue,' and to have found oneself in presence of Messrs Armitage and Ramsden smoking, Malone swaggering, your uncle sneering, Mr Sykes sipping a cordial, and Moore himself in his cold man-of-business vein: I am glad we missed it all."

"I wonder if there are many in the mill, Shirley!"

"Plenty to defend it. The soldiers we have twice seen to-day were going there no doubt, and the group we noticed surrounding your cousin in the fields will be with him."

"What are they doing now, Shirley? What is that noise?"

"Hatchets and crowbars against the yard-gates: they are forcing them. Are you afraid?"

"No; but my heart throbs fast; I have a difficulty in standing: I will sit down. Do you feel unmoved?"

"Hardly that—but I am glad I came: we shall see what transpires with our own eyes: we are here on the spot, and none know it. Instead of amazing the curate, the clothier, and the corn-dealer with a romantic rush

on the stage, we stand alone with the friendly night, its mute stars, and these whispering trees, whose report our friends will not come to gather."

"Shirley—Shirley, the gates are down! That crash was like the felling of great trees. Now they are pouring through. They will break down the mill doors as they have broken the gate: what can Robert do against so many? Would to God I were a little nearer him—could hear him speak—could speak to him! With my will—my longing to serve him—I could not be a useless burden in his way: I could be turned to some account."

"They come on!" cried Shirley. "How steadily they march in! There is discipline in their ranks—I will not say there is courage: hundreds against tens are no proof of that quality; but" (she dropped her voice) "there is suffering and desperation enough amongst them—these goads will urge them forwards."

"Forwards against Robert—and they hate him. Shirley, is there much danger they will win the day?"

"We shall see. Moore and Helstone are of 'earth's first blood'—no bunglers—no cravens"——

A crash—smash—shiver—stopped their whispers. A simultaneously-hurled volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane of every lattice lay in shattered and pounded fragments. A yell followed this demonstration—a rioters' yell—a North-of-England—a Yorkshire — a West-Riding — a West-Riding-clothing-district-of-Yorkshire rioters' yell. You never heard that sound, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears—perhaps for your heart; since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself, or to the men or principles you approve, the interests to which you wish well, Wrath wakens to the cry of Hate: the Lion shakes his mane, and rises to the howl of the Hyena: Caste

stands up, ireful against Caste; and the indignant, wronged spirit of the Middle Rank bears down in zeal and scorn on the famished and furious mass of the Operative class. It is difficult to be tolerant—difficult to be just—in such moments.

Caroline rose, Shirley put her arm round her: they stood together as still as the straight stems of two trees. That yell was a long one, and when it ceased, the night was yet full of the swaying and murmuring of a crowd.

"What next?" was the question of the listeners. Nothing came yet. The mill remained mute as a mausoleum.

"He *cannot* be alone!" whispered Caroline.

"I would stake all I have, that he is as little alone as he is alarmed," responded Shirley.

Shots were discharged by the rioters. Had the defenders waited for this signal! It seemed so. The hitherto inert and passive mill woke: fire flashed from its empty window-frames; a volley of musketry pealed sharp through the Hollow.

"Moore speaks at last!" said Shirley, "and he seems to have the gift of tongues; that was not a single voice."

"He has been forbearing; no one can accuse him of rashness," alleged Caroline: "their discharge preceded his: they broke his gates and his windows; they fired at his garrison before he repelled them."

What was going on now? It seemed difficult, in the darkness, to distinguish, but something terrible, a still-renewing tumult, was obvious: fierce attacks, desperate repulses; the mill-yard, the mill itself, was full of battle movement: there was scarcely any cessation now of the discharge of firearms; and there was struggling, rushing, trampling, and shouting between. The aim of the assailants seemed to be to enter the mill, that of the defendants to beat them off. They

heard the rebel leader cry, "To the back, lads!" They heard a voice retort, "Come round, we will meet you!"

"To the counting-house!" was the order again.

"Welcome!—We shall have you there!" was the response. And accordingly, the fiercest blaze that had yet glowed, the loudest rattle that had yet been heard, burst from the counting-house front, when the mass of rioters rushed up to it.

The voice that had spoken was Moore's own voice. They could tell by its tones that his soul was now warm with the conflict: they could guess that the fighting animal was roused in every one of those men there struggling together, and was for the time quite paramount above the rational human being.

Both the girls felt their faces glow and their pulses throb: both knew they would do no good by rushing down into the mêlée: they desired neither to deal nor to receive blows; but they could not have run away—Caroline no more than Shirley; they could not have fainted; they could not have taken their eyes from the dim, terrible scene—from the mass of cloud, of smoke—the musket-lightning—for the world.

"How and when would it end?" was the demand throbbing in their throbbing pulses. "Would a juncture arise in which they could be useful?" was what they waited to see; for, though Shirley put off their too-late arrival with a jest, and was ever ready to satirise her own or any other person's enthusiasm, she would have given a farm of her best land for a chance of rendering good service.

The chance was not vouchsafed her; the looked-for juncture never came: it was not likely. Moore had expected this attack for days, perhaps weeks: he was prepared for it at every point. He had fortified and garrisoned his mill, which in itself was a strong build-

ing: he was a cool, brave man: he stood to the defence with unflinching firmness; those who were with him caught his spirit, and copied his demeanour. The rioters had never been so met before. At other mills they had attacked, they had found no resistance; an organised, resolute defence was what they never dreamed of encountering. When their leaders saw the steady fire kept up from the mill, witnessed the composure and determination of its owner, heard themselves coolly defied and invited on to death, and beheld their men falling wounded round them, they felt that nothing was to be done here. In haste, they mustered their forces, drew them away from the building: a roll was called over, in which the men answered to figures instead of names: they dispersed wide over the fields, leaving silence and ruin behind them. The attack, from its commencement to its termination, had not occupied an hour.

Day was by this time approaching: the west was dim, the east beginning to gleam. It would have seemed that the girls who had watched this conflict would now wish to hasten to the victors, on whose side all their interest had been enlisted; but they only very cautiously approached the now battered mill, and, when suddenly a number of soldiers and gentlemen appeared at the great door opening into the yard, they quickly stepped aside into a shed, the deposit of old iron and timber, whence they could see without being seen.

It was no cheering spectacle: these premises were now a mere blot of desolation on the fresh front of the summer-dawn. All the copse up the Hollow was shady and dewy, the hill at its head was green; but just here in the centre of the sweet glen, Discord, broken loose in the night from control, had beaten the ground with his stamping hoofs, and left it waste and pulverised. The mill yawned all ruinous with unglazed

frames; the yard was thickly bestrewn with stones and brickbats, and, close under the mill, with the glittering fragments of the shattered windows, muskets and other weapons lay here and there; more than one deep crimson stain was visible on the gravel; a human body lay quiet on its face near the gates; and five or six wounded men writhed and moaned in the bloody dust.

Miss Keeldar's countenance changed at this view: it was the after-taste of the battle, death and pain replacing excitement and exertion: it was the blackness the bright fire leaves when its blaze is sunk, its warmth failed, and its glow faded.

"That is what I wished to prevent," she said, in a voice whose cadence betrayed the altered impulse of her heart.

"But you could not prevent it; you did your best; it was in vain," said Caroline comfortingly. "Don't grieve, Shirley."

"I am sorry for those poor fellows," was the answer, while the spark in her glance dissolved to dew. "Are any within the mill hurt, I wonder? Is that your uncle?"

"It is, and there is Mr Malone, and, O Shirley! there is Robert!"

"Well," (resuming her former tone,) "don't squeeze your fingers quite into my hand: I see, there is nothing wonderful in that. We knew he, at least, was here, whoever might be absent."

"He is coming here towards us, Shirley!"

"Towards the pump, that is to say, for the purpose of washing his hands and his forehead, which has got a scratch, I perceive."

"He bleeds, Shirley: don't hold me; I must go."

"Not a step."

"He is hurt, Shirley!"

"Fiddlestick!"

"But I *must* go to him: I wish to go so much: I cannot bear to be restrained."

"What for?"

"To speak to him, to ask how he is, and what I can do for him?"

"To teaze and annoy him; to make a spectacle of yourself and him before those soldiers, Mr Malone, your uncle, et cetera. Would he like it, think you? Would you like to remember it a week hence?"

"Am I always to be curbed and kept down?" demanded Caroline, a little passionately.

"For his sake, yes. And still more for your own. I tell you, if you showed yourself now, you would repent it an hour hence, and so would Robert."

"You think he would not like it, Shirley?"

"Far less than he would like our stopping him to say good-night, which you were so sore about."

"But that was all play; there was no danger."

"And this is serious work: he must be unmolested."

"I only wish to go to him because he is my cousin —you understand?"

"I quite understand. But now, watch him. He has bathed his forehead, and the blood has ceased trickling; his hurt is really a mere graze: I can see it from hence: he is going to look after the wounded men."

Accordingly Mr Moore and Mr Helstone went round the yard, examining each prostrate form. They then gave directions to have the wounded taken up and carried into the mill. This duty being performed, Joe Scott was ordered to saddle his master's horse and Mr Helstone's pony, and the two gentlemen rode away full gallop, to seek surgical aid in different directions.

Caroline was not yet pacified.

"Shirley, Shirley, I should have liked to speak one word to him before he went," she murmured, while the tears gathered glittering in her eyes.

"Why do you cry, Lina?" asked Miss Keeldar a little sternly. "You ought to be glad instead of sorry. Robert has escaped any serious harm; he is victorious; he has been cool and brave in combat; he is now considerate in triumph: is this a time—are these causes for weeping?"

"You do not know what I have in my heart," pleaded the other: "what pain, what distraction; nor whence it arises. I can understand that you should exult in Robert's greatness and goodness; so do I, in one sense, but, in another, I feel so miserable. I am too far removed from him: I used to be nearer. Let me alone, Shirley: do let me cry a few minutes; it relieves me."

Miss Keeldar, feeling her tremble in every limb, ceased to expostulate with her: she went out of the shed, and left her to weep in peace. It was the best plan: in a few minutes Caroline rejoined her, much calmer: she said with her natural, docile, gentle manner —"Come, Shirley, we will go home now. I promise not to try to see Robert again till he asks for me. I never will try to push myself on him. I thank you for restraining me just now."

"I did it with a good intention," returned Miss Keeldar.

"Now, dear Lina," she continued, "let us turn our faces to the cool morning breeze, and walk very quietly back to the Rectory. We will steal in as we stole out; none shall know where we have been, or what we have seen to-night: neither taunt nor misconstruction can consequently molest us. To-morrow, we will see Robert, and be of good cheer; but I will say no more, lest I should begin to cry too. I seem hard towards you, but I am not so."

Chapter xx.

TO-MORROW.

THE two girls met no living soul on their way back to the Rectory: they let themselves in noiselessly; they stole upstairs unheard: the breaking morning gave them what light they needed. Shirley sought her couch immediately; and, though the room was strange—for she had never slept at the Rectory before—and though the recent scene was one unparalleled for excitement and terror by any it had hitherto been her lot to witness, yet, scarce was her head laid on the pillow, ere a deep, refreshing sleep closed her eyes, and calmed her senses.

Perfect health was Shirley's enviable portion; though warmhearted and sympathetic, she was not nervous: powerful emotions could rouse and sway, without exhausting her spirit: the tempest troubled and shook her while it lasted; but it left her elasticity unbent, and her freshness quite unblighted. As every day brought her stimulating emotion, so every night yielded her recreating rest. Caroline now watched her sleeping, and read the serenity of her mind in the beauty of her happy countenance.

For herself, being of a different temperament, she could not sleep. The commonplace excitement of the tea-drinking and school-gathering, would alone have sufficed to make her restless all night: the effect of the terrible drama which had just been enacted before her eyes was not likely to quit her for days. It was vain even to try to retain a recumbent posture: she sat up by Shirley's side, counting the slow minutes, and watching the June sun mount the heavens.

Life wastes fast in such vigils as Caroline had of late but too often kept; vigils during which the mind—

having no pleasant food to nourish it—no manna of hope—no hived-honey of joyous memories—tries to live on the meagre diet of wishes, and failing to derive thence either delight or support, and feeling itself ready to perish with craving want, turns to philosophy, to resolution, to resignation; calls on all these gods for aid, calls vainly—is unheard, unhelped, and languishes.

Caroline was a Christian; therefore in trouble she framed many a prayer after the Christian creed; preferred it with deep earnestness; begged for patience, strength, relief. This world, however, we all know, is the scene of trial and probation; and, for any favourable result her petitions had yet wrought, it seemed to her that they were unheard and unaccepted. She believed, sometimes, that God had turned his face from her. At moments she was a Calvinist, and, sinking into the gulf of religious despair, she saw darkening over her the doom of reprobation.

Most people have had a period or periods in their lives when they have felt thus forsaken; when, having long hoped against hope, and still seen the day of fruition deferred, their hearts have truly sickened within them. This is a terrible hour, but it is often that darkest point which precedes the rise of day; that turn of the year when the icy January wind carries over the waste at once the dirge of departing winter, and the prophecy of coming spring. The perishing birds, however, cannot thus understand the blast before which they shiver; and as little can the suffering soul recognise, in the climax of its affliction, the dawn of its deliverance. Yet, let whoever grieves still cling fast to love and faith in God: God will never deceive, never finally desert him. "Whom He loveth, He chasteneth." These words are true, and should not be forgotten.

The household was astir at last: the servants were up; the shutters were opened below. Caroline, as she

quitted the couch, which had been but a thorny one to her, felt that revival of spirits which the return of day, of action, gives to all but the wholly despairing or actually dying: she dressed herself, as usual, carefully, trying so to arrange her hair and attire that nothing of the forlornness she felt at heart should be visible externally: she looked as fresh as Shirley when both were dressed, only that Miss Keeldar's eyes were lively, and Miss Helstone's languid.

"To-day I shall have much to say to Moore," were Shirley's first words; and you could see in her face that life was full of interest, expectation, and occupation for her. "He will have to undergo cross-examination," she added: "I daresay he thinks he has outwitted me cleverly. And this is the way men deal with women; still concealing danger from them: thinking, I suppose, to spare them pain. They imagined we little knew where they were to-night: we *know* they little conjectured where we were. Men, I believe, fancy women's minds something like those of children. Now, that is a mistake."

This was said as she stood at the glass, training her naturally waved hair into curls, by twining it round her fingers. She took up the theme again five minutes after, as Caroline fastened her dress and clasped her girdle.

"If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. Then to hear them fall into ecstacies with each other's creations, worshipping the heroine of such a poem—novel—drama, thinking it fine—divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial—

false as the rose in my best bonnet there. If I spoke all I think on this point; if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half-an-hour."

"Shirley, you chatter so, I can't fasten you: be still. And after all, authors' heroines are almost as good as authoress's heroes."

"Not at all: women read men more truly than men read women. I'll prove that in a magazine paper some day when I've time; only it will never be inserted: it will be 'declined with thanks,' and left for me at the publisher's."

"To be sure: you could not write cleverly enough; you don't know enough; you are not learned, Shirley."

"God knows, I can't contradict you, Cary: I'm as ignorant as a stone. There's one comfort, however, you are not much better."

They descended to breakfast.

"I wonder how Mrs Pryor and Hortense Moore have passed the night," said Caroline, as she made the coffee. "Selfish being that I am! I never thought of either of them till just now: they will have heard all the tumult, Fieldhead and the Cottage are so near; and Hortense is timid in such matters: so no doubt is Mrs Pryor."

"Take my word for it, Lina, Moore will have contrived to get his sister out of the way: she went home with Miss Mann; he will have quartered her there for the night. As to Mrs Pryor, I own I am uneasy about her; but in another half-hour we will be with her."

By this time the news of what had happened at the Hollow was spread all over the neighbourhood. Fanny, who had been to Fieldhead to fetch the milk, returned in panting haste, with tidings that there had

been a battle in the night at Mr Moore's mill, and that some said twenty men were killed. Eliza, during Fanny's absence, had been apprised by the butcher's boy that the mill was burnt to the ground. Both women rushed into the parlour to announce these terrible facts to the ladies, terminating their clear and accurate narrative by the assertion that they were sure master must have been in it all. He and Thomas, the clerk, they were confident, must have gone last night to join Mr Moore and the soldiers: Mr Malone, too, had not been heard of at his lodgings since yesterday afternoon; and Joe Scott's wife and family were in the greatest distress, wondering what had become of their head.

Scarcely was this information imparted when a knock at the kitchen-door announced the Fieldhead errand-boy, arrived in hot haste, bearing a billet from Mrs Pryor. It was hurriedly written, and urged Miss Keeldar to return directly, as the neighbourhood and the house seemed likely to be all in confusion, and orders would have to be given which the mistress of the hall alone could regulate. In a postscript it was entreated that Miss Helstone might not be left alone at the Rectory: she had better, it was suggested, accompany Miss Keeldar.

"There are not two opinions on that head," said Shirley, as she tied on her own bonnet, and then ran to fetch Caroline's.

"But what will Fanny and Eliza do? And if my uncle returns?"

"Your uncle will not return yet; he has other fish to fry; he will be galloping backwards and forwards from Briarfield to Stilbro' all day, rousing the magistrates in the court-house, and the officers at the barracks; and Fanny and Eliza can have in Joe Scott's and the clerk's wives to bear them company. Besides, of course, there is no real danger to be

apprehended now: weeks will elapse before the rioters can again rally, or plan any other attempt; and I am much mistaken if Moore and Mr Helstone will not take advantage of last night's outbreak to quell them altogether: they will frighten the authorities of Stilbro' into energetic measures. I only hope they will not be too severe—not pursue the discomfited too relentlessly."

"Robert will not be cruel: we saw that last night," said Caroline.

"But he will be hard," retorted Shirley; "and so will your uncle."

As they hurried along the meadow and plantation-path to Fieldhead, they saw the distant highway already alive with an unwonted flow of equestrians and pedestrians, tending in the direction of the usually solitary Hollow. On reaching the hall, they found the back-yard gates open, and the court and kitchen seemed crowded with excited milk-fetchers—men, women, and children, whom Mrs Gill, the housekeeper, appeared vainly persuading to take their milk-cans and depart. (It *is*, or *was*, by-the-bye, the custom in the north of England for the cottagers on a country squire's estate to receive their supplies of milk and butter from the dairy of the Manor-House, on whose pastures a herd of milch kine was usually fed for the convenience of the neighbourhood. Miss Keeldar owned such a herd—all deep-dewlapped, Craven cows, reared on the sweet herbage and clear waters of bonnie Airedale; and very proud she was of their sleek aspect and high condition.) Seeing now the state of matters, and that it was desirable to effect a clearance of the premises, Shirley stepped in amongst the gossiping groups. She bade them good-morning with a certain frank, tranquil ease—the natural characteristic of her manner when she addressed numbers; especially if those numbers belonged to the working-class; she was cooler amongst her

equals, and rather proud to those above her. She then asked them if they had all got their milk measured out, and understanding that they had, she further observed that she "wondered what they were waiting for, then."

"We're just talking a bit over this battle there has been at your mill, Mistress," replied a man.

"Talking a bit! Just like you!" said Shirley. "It is a queer thing all the world is so fond of *talking* over events: you *talk* if anybody dies suddenly; you *talk* if a fire breaks out; you *talk* if a mill-owner fails; you *talk* if he's murdered. What good does your talking do?"

There is nothing the lower orders like better than a little downright good-humoured rating. Flattery they scorn very much: honest abuse they enjoy. They call it speaking plainly, and take a sincere delight in being the objects thereof. The homely harshness of Miss Keeldar's saluation won her the ear of the whole throng in a second.

"We're no war nor some 'at is aboon us; are we?" asked a man smiling.

"Nor a whit better: you that should be models of industry are just as gossip-loving as the idle. Fine, rich people that have nothing to do, may be partly excused for trifling their time away: you who have to earn your bread with the sweat of your brow are quite inexcuseable."

"That's queer, Mistress: suld we never have a holiday because we work hard?"

"*Never*," was the prompt answer; "unless," added the 'mistress,' with a smile that half-belied the severity of her speech, "unless you knew how to make a better use of it than to get together over rum and tea, if you are women—or over beer and pipes, if you are men, and *talk* scandal at your neighbours' expense. Come, friends," she added, changing at once from bluntness to

courtesy, "oblige me by taking your cans and going home. I expect several persons to call to-day, and it will be inconvenient to have the avenues to the house crowded."

Yorkshire people are as yielding to persuasion as they are stubborn against compulsion: the yard was clear in five minutes.

"Thank you, and good-bye to you, friends," said Shirley, as she closed the gates on a quiet court.

Now, let me hear the most refined of Cockneys presume to find fault with Yorkshire manners! Taken as they ought to be, the majority of the lads and lasses of the West-Riding are gentlemen and ladies, every inch of them: it is only against the weak affectation and futile pomposity of a would-be aristocrat they turn mutinous.

Entering by the back-way, the young ladies passed through the kitchen (or *house*, as the inner kitchen is called) to the hall. Mrs Pryor came running down the oak staircase to meet them. She was all unnerved: her naturally sanguine complexion was pale; her usually placid, though timid, blue eye was wandering, unsettled, alarmed. She did not, however, break out into any exclamations, or hurried narrative of what had happened. Her predominant feeling had been in the course of the night, and was now this morning, a sense of dissatisfaction with herself that she could not feel firmer, cooler, more equal to the demands of the occasion.

"You are aware," she began with a trembling voice, and yet the most conscientious anxiety to avoid exaggeration in what she was about to say,—"that a body of rioters has attacked Mr Moore's mill to-night: we heard the firing and confusion very plainly here; we none of us slept: it was a sad night: the house has been in great bustle all the morning with people coming and going: the servants have applied to me for orders and directions, which I really did not feel warranted in

giving. Mr Moore has, I believe, sent up for refreshments for the soldiers and others engaged in the defence; for some conveniences also for the wounded. I could not undertake the responsibility of giving orders or taking measures. I fear delay may have been injurious in some instances; but this is not my house: you were absent, my dear Miss Keeldar—what could I do?"

"Were no refreshments sent?" asked Shirley, while her countenance, hitherto so clear, propitious, and quiet, even while she was rating the milk-fetchers, suddenly turned dark and warm.

"I think not, my dear."

"And nothing for the wounded? no linen—no wine—no bedding?"

"I think not. I cannot tell what Mrs Gill did: but it seemed impossible to me, at the moment, to venture to dispose of your property by sending supplies to soldiers—provisions for a company of soldiers sounds formidable: how many there are I did not ask; but I could not think of allowing them to pillage the house, as it were. I intended to do what was right; yet I did not see the case quite clearly, I own."

"It lies in a nutshell, notwithstanding. These soldiers have risked their lives in defence of my property—I suppose they have a right to my gratitude: the wounded are our fellow-creatures—I suppose we should aid them. Mrs Gill!"

She turned, and called in a voice more clear than soft. It rung through the thick oak of the hall and kitchen doors more effectually than a bell's summons. Mrs Gill, who was deep in bread-making, came with hands and apron in culinary case, not having dared to stop to rub the dough from the one, or to shake the flour from the other. Her mistress had never called a servant in that voice, save once before, and that was when she had seen from the window Tartar in full tug

with two carriers' dogs, each of them a match for him in size, if not in courage, and their masters standing by, encouraging their animals, while hers was unbefriended: then, indeed, she had summoned John as if the Day of Judgment were at hand: nor had she waited for the said John's coming, but had walked out into the lane bonnetless; and after informing the carriers that she held them far less of men than the three brutes whirling and worrying in the dust before them, had put her hands round the thick neck of the largest of the curs and given her whole strength to the essay of choking it from Tartar's torn and bleeding eye, just above and below which organ the vengeful fangs were inserted. Five or six men were presently on the spot to help her, but she never thanked one of them: "they might have come before, if their will had been good," she said. She had not a word for anybody during the rest of the day; but sat near the hall fire till evening watching and tending Tartar, who lay all gory, stiff, and swelled on a mat at her feet. She wept furtively over him sometimes, and murmured the softest words of pity and endearment, in tones whose music the old, scarred, canine warrior acknowledged by licking her hand or her sandal alternately with his own red wounds. As to John, his lady turned a cold shoulder on him for a week afterwards.

Mrs Gill, remembering this little episode, came "all of a tremble," as she said herself. In a firm, brief voice, Miss Keeldar proceeded to put questions and give orders. That at such a time Fieldhead should have evinced the inhospitality of a miser's hovel, stung her haughty spirit to the quick; and the revolt of its pride was seen in the heaving of her heart; stirred stormily under the lace and silk which veiled it.

"How long is it since that message came from the mill?"

"Not an hour yet, ma'am," answered the housekeeper soothingly.

"Not an hour! You might almost as well have said not a day. They will have applied elsewhere by this time. Send a man instantly down to tell them that everything this house contains is at Mr Moore's, Mr Helstone's, and the soldiers' service. Do that first!"

While the order was being executed, Shirley moved away from her friends, and stood at the hall-window, silent, unapproachable. When Mrs Gill came back, she turned: the purple flush which painful excitement kindles on a pale cheek, glowed on hers: the spark which displeasure lights in a dark eye fired her glance.

"Let the contents of the larder and the wine-cellar be brought up, put into the hay-carts, and driven down to the Hollow. If there does not happen to be much bread or much meat in the house, go to the butcher and baker, and desire them to send what they have: but I will see for myself."

She moved off.

"All will be right soon: she will get over it in an hour," whispered Caroline to Mrs Pryor. "Go upstairs, dear madam," she added affectionately, "and try to be as calm and easy as you can. The truth is, Shirley will blame herself more than you before the day is over."

By dint of a few more gentle assurances and persuasions, Miss Helstone contrived to soothe the agitated lady. Having accompanied her to her apartment, and promised to rejoin her there when things were settled, Caroline left her to see, as she said, "if she could be useful." She presently found that she could be very useful; for the retinue of servants at Fieldhead was by no means numerous, and just now their mistress found plenty of occupation for all the hands at her command,

and for her own also. The delicate good-nature and dexterous activity which Caroline brought to the aid of the housekeeper and maids,—all somewhat scared by their lady's unwonted mood—did a world of good at once: it helped the assistants and appeased the directress. A chance glance and smile from Caroline moved Shirley to an answering smile directly. The former was carrying a heavy basket up the cellar-stairs.

"This is a shame," cried Shirley, running to her. "It will strain your arm."

She took it from her, and herself bore it out into the yard. The cloud of temper was dispelled when she came back; the flash in her eye was melted; the shade on her forehead vanished: she resumed her usual cheerful and cordial manner to those about her, tempering her revived spirits with a little of the softness of shame at her previous unjust anger.

She was still superintending the lading of the cart, when a gentleman entered the yard and approached her ere she was aware of his presence.

"I hope I see Miss Keeldar well this morning?" he said, examining with rather significant scrutiny her still flushed face.

She gave him a look, and then again bent to her employment, without reply. A pleasant enough smile played on her lips, but she hid it. The gentleman repeated his salutation, stooping, that it might reach her ear with more facility.

"Well enough, if she be good enough," was the answer; "and so is Mr Moore too, I dare say. To speak truth, I am not anxious about him; some slight mischance would be only his just due: his conduct has been—we will say *strange*, just now, till we have time to characterise it by a more exact epithet. Meantime, may I ask what brings him here?"

"Mr Helstone and I have just received your message,

that everything at Fieldhead was at our service. We judged, by the unlimited wording of the gracious intimation, that you would be giving yourself too much trouble: I perceive our conjecture was correct. We are not a regiment, remember: only about half-a-dozen soldiers, and as many civilians. Allow me to retrench something from these too abundant supplies."

Miss Keeldar blushed, while she laughed at her own over-eager generosity, and most disproportionate calculations. Moore laughed too—very quietly, though; and as quietly, he ordered basket after basket to be taken from the cart, and remanded vessel after vessel to the cellar.

"The Rector must hear of this," he said: "he will make a good story of it. What an excellent army contractor Miss Keeldar would have been!" again he laughed, adding—"It is precisely as I conjectured."

"You ought to be thankful," said Shirley, "and not mock me. What could I do? How could I gauge your appetites, or number your band? For aught I knew, their might have been fifty of you at least to victual. You told me nothing; and then, an application to provision soldiers naturally suggests large ideas."

"It appears so," remarked Moore, levelling another of his keen, quiet glances at the discomfited Shirley. "Now," he continued, addressing the carter, "I think you may take what remains to the Hollow. Your load will be somewhat lighter than the one Miss Keeldar destined you to carry."

As the vehicle rumbled out of the yard, Shirley, rallying her spirits, demanded what had become of the wounded.

"There was not a single man hurt on our side," was the answer.

"You were hurt yourself, on the temples," interposed

a quick, low voice—that of Caroline, who, having withdrawn within the shade of the door, and behind the large person of Mrs Gill, had till now escaped Moore's notice: when she spoke, his eye searched the obscurity of her retreat.

"Are you much hurt?" she inquired.

"As you might scratch your finger with a needle in sewing."

"Lift your hair, and let us see."

He took his hat off, and did as he was bid, disclosing only a narrow slip of court-plaster. Caroline indicated, by a slight movement of the head, that she was satisfied, and disappeared within the clear obscure of the interior.

"How did she know I was hurt?" asked Moore.

"By rumour, no doubt. But it is too good in her to trouble herself about you. For my part, it was of your victims I was thinking when I inquired after the wounded: what damage have your opponents sustained?"

"One of the rioters, or victims, as you call them, was killed, and six were hurt."

"What have you done with them?"

"What you will perfectly approve. Medical aid was procured immediately; and as soon as we can get a couple of covered waggons, and some clean straw, they will be removed to Stilbro'."

"Straw! you must have beds and bedding. I will send my waggon directly, properly furnished; and Mr Yorke, I am sure, will send his."

"You guess correctly: he has volunteered already; and Mrs Yorke—who, like you, seems disposed to regard the rioters as martyrs, and me, and especially Mr Helstone, as murderers—is at this moment, I believe, most assiduously engaged in fitting it up with feather-beds, pillows, bolsters, blankets, &c. The *victims* lack no attentions—I promise you. Mr Hall—your favourite

parson—has been with them ever since six o'clock, exhorting them, praying with them, and even waiting on them like any nurse; and Caroline's good friend, Miss Ainley, that *very* plain old maid, sent in a stock of lint and linen, something in the proportion of another lady's allowance of beef and wine."

"That will do. Where is your sister?"

"Well cared for. I had her securely domiciled with Miss Mann. This very morning, the two set out for Wormwood Wells (a noted watering-place), and will stay there some weeks."

"So Mr Helstone domiciled me at the Rectory! Mighty clever you gentlemen think you are! I make you heartily welcome to the idea, and hope its savour, as you chew the cud of reflection upon it, gives you pleasure. Acute and astute, why are you not also omniscient? How is it that events transpire, under your very noses, of which you have no suspicion? It should be so, otherwise the exquisite gratification of out-manœuvring you would be unknown. Ah! friend, you may search my countenance, but you cannot read it."

Moore, indeed, looked as if he could not.

"You think me a dangerous specimen of my sex. Don't you, now?"

"A peculiar one, at least."

"But Caroline—is she peculiar?"

"In her way—yes."

"Her way! What is her way?"

"You know her as well as I do."

"And knowing her I assert that she is neither eccentric nor difficult of control: is she?"

"That depends"——

"However, there is nothing masculine about *her?*"

"Why lay such emphasis on *her?* Do you consider her a contrast, in that respect, to yourself?"

"You do, no doubt: but that does not signify.

Caroline is neither masculine, nor of what they call the spirited order of women."

"I have seen her flash out."

"So have I—but not with manly fire: it was a short, vivid, trembling glow, that shot up, shone, vanished"——

"And left her scared at her own daring. You describe others besides Caroline."

"The point I wish to establish is, that Miss Helstone, though gentle, tractable, and candid enough, is still perfectly capable of defying even Mr Moore's penetration."

"What have you and she been doing?" asked Moore suddenly.

"Have you had any breakfast?"

"What is your mutual mystery?"

"If you are hungry, Mrs Gill will give you something to eat here. Step into the oak-parlour, and ring the bell—you will be served as if at an inn; or, if you like better, go back to the Hollow."

"The alternative is not open to me: I *must* go back. Good-morning: the first leisure I have, I will see you again."

Chapter XXI.

MRS PRYOR.

WHILE Shirley was talking with Moore, Caroline rejoined Mrs Pryor upstairs. She found that lady deeply depressed. She would not say that Miss Keeldar's hastiness had hurt her feelings; but it was evident an inward wound galled her. To any but a congenial nature, she would have seemed insensible to the quiet, tender attentions by which Miss Helstone sought to impart solace; but Caroline knew

that, unmoved or slightly moved as she looked, she felt, valued, and was healed by them.

"I am deficient in self-confidence and decision," she said at last. "I always have been deficient in those qualities: yet I think Miss Keeldar should have known my character well enough by this time, to be aware that I always feel an even painful solicitude to do right, to act for the best. The unusual nature of the demand on my judgment puzzled me, especially following the alarms of the night. I could not venture to act promptly for another: but I trust no serious harm will result from my lapse of firmness."

A gentle knock was here heard at the door: it was half-opened.

"Caroline, come here," said a low voice.

Miss Helstone went out: there stood Shirley in the gallery, looking contrite, ashamed, sorry as any repentant child.

"How is Mrs Pryor?" she asked.

"Rather out of spirits," said Caroline.

"I have behaved very shamefully, very ungenerously, very ungratefully to her," said Shirley. "How insolent in me to turn on her thus, for what after all was no fault, only an excess of conscientiousness on her part. But I regret my error most sincerely: tell her so, and ask if she will forgive me."

Caroline discharged the errand with heartfelt pleasure. Mrs Pryor rose, came to the door: she did not like scenes; she dreaded them as all timid people do: she said falteringly—"Come in, my dear."

Shirley did come in with some impetuosity: she threw her arms round her governess, and while she kissed her heartily, she said—"You know you *must* forgive me, Mrs Pryor. I could not get on at all if there was a misunderstanding between you and me."

"I have nothing to forgive," was the reply. "We

will pass it over now if you please. The final result of the incident is, that it proves more plainly than ever how unequal I am to certain crises."

And that was the painful feeling which *would* remain on Mrs Pryor's mind: no effort of Shirley's or Caroline's could efface it thence: she could forgive her offending pupil, not her innocent self.

Miss Keeldar, doomed to be in constant request during the morning, was presently summoned downstairs again. The Rector called first: a lively welcome and livelier reprimand were at his service; he expected both, and, being in high spirits, took them in equally good part.

In the course of his brief visit, he quite forgot to ask after his niece: the riot, the rioters, the mill, the magistrates, the heiress, absorbed all his thoughts to the exclusion of family ties. He alluded to the part himself and curate had taken in the defence of the Hollow.

"The vials of pharisaical wrath will be emptied on our heads, for our share in this business," he said; "but I defy every calumniator. I was there only to support the law, to play my part as a man and a Briton; which characters I deem quite compatible with those of the priest and Levite, in their highest sense. Your tenant, Moore," he went on, "has won my approbation. A cooler commander I would not wish to see, nor a more determined. Besides, the man has shown sound judgment and good sense; first, in being thoroughly prepared for the event which has taken place, and subsequently, when his well-concerted plans had secured him success, in knowing how to use without abusing his victory. Some of the magistrates are now well frightened, and, like all cowards, show a tendency to be cruel; Moore restrains them with admirable prudence. He has hitherto been very unpopular

in the neighbourhood; but, mark my words, the tide of opinion will now take a turn in his favour: people will find out that they have not appreciated him, and will hasten to remedy their error; and he, when he perceives the public disposed to acknowledge his merits, will show a more gracious mien than that with which he has hitherto favoured us."

Mr Helstone was about to add to this speech some half-jesting, half-serious warnings to Miss Keeldar, on the subject of her rumoured partiality for her talented tenant, when a ring at the door, announcing another caller, checked his raillery; and as that other caller appeared in the form of a white-haired, elderly gentleman, with a rather truculent countenance and disdainful eye—in short, our old acquaintance, and the Rector's old enemy, Mr Yorke—the priest and Levite seized his hat, and with the briefest of adieux to Miss Keeldar, and the sternest of nods to her guest, took an abrupt leave.

Mr Yorke was in no mild mood, and in no measured terms did he express his opinion on the transaction of the night: Moore, the magistrates, the soldiers, the mob-leaders, each and all came in for a share of his invectives; but he reserved his strongest epithets—and real racy Yorkshire Doric adjectives they were—for the benefit of the fighting parsons, the "sanguinary, demoniac" rector and curate. According to him, the cup of ecclesiastical guilt was now full indeed.

"The Church," he said, "was in a bonnie pickle now: it was time it came down when parsons took to swaggering amang soldiers, blazing away wi' bullet and gunpowder, taking the lives of far honester men than themselves."

"What would Moore have done, if nobody had helped him?" asked Shirley.

"Drunk as he'd brewed—eaten as he'd baked."

"Which means, you would have left him by himself to face that mob. Good. He has plenty of courage; but the greatest amount of gallantry that ever garrisoned one human breast could scarce avail against two hundred."

"He had the soldiers; those poor slaves who hire out their own blood and spill other folk's for money."

"You abuse soldiers almost as much as you abuse clergymen. All who wear red coats are national refuse in your eyes, and all who wear black are national swindlers. Mr Moore, according to you, did wrong to get military aid, and he did still worse to accept of any other aid. Your way of talking amounts to this:—he should have abandoned his mill and his life to the rage of a set of misguided madmen, and Mr Helstone and every other gentleman in the parish should have looked on, and seen the building razed and its owner slaughtered, and never stirred a finger to save either."

"If Moore had behaved to his men from the beginning as a master ought to behave, they never would have entertained their present feelings towards him."

"Easy for you to talk," exclaimed Miss Keeldar, who was beginning to wax warm in her tenant's cause: "you, whose family have lived at Briarmans for six generations, to whose person the people have been accustomed for fifty years, who know all their ways, prejudices, and preferences. Easy, indeed, for *you* to act so as to avoid offending them; but Mr Moore came a stranger into the district: he came here poor and friendless, with nothing but his own energies to back him; nothing but his honour, his talent, and his industry to make his way for him. A monstrous crime indeed that, under such circumstances, he could not popularise his naturally grave, quiet manners, all at once: could not be jocular, and free, and cordial with a strange peasantry, as you are with your fellow-towns-

men! An unpardonable transgression, that when he introduced improvements he did not go about the business in quite the most politic way; did not graduate his changes as delicately as a rich capitalist might have done! For errors of this sort is he to be the victim of mob-outrage? Is he to be denied even the privilege of defending himself? Are those who have the hearts of men in their breasts (and Mr Helstone—say what you will of him—has such a heart) to be reviled like malefactors because they stand by him—because they venture to espouse the cause of one against two hundred?"

"Come—come now—be cool," said Mr Yorke, smiling at the earnestness with which Shirley multiplied her rapid questions.

"Cool! Must I listen coolly to downright nonsense—to dangerous nonsense? No. I like you very well, Mr Yorke, as you know; but I thoroughly dislike some of your principles. All that cant—excuse me, but I repeat the word—all that *cant* about soldiers and parsons is most offensive in my ears. All ridiculous, irrational crying up of one class, whether the same be aristocrat or democrat—all howling down of another class, whether clerical or military—all exacting injustice to individuals, whether monarch or mendicant—is really sickening to me: all arraying of ranks against ranks, all party hatreds, all tyrannies disguised as liberties, I reject and wash my hands of. *You* think you are a philanthropist; *you* think you are an advocate of liberty; but I will tell you this—Mr Hall, the parson of Nunnely, is a better friend both of man and freedom than Hiram Yorke, the Reformer of Briarfield."

From a man, Mr Yorke would not have borne this language very patiently, nor would he have endured it from some women; but he accounted Shirley both honest and pretty, and her plain-spoken ire amused him: besides, he took a secret pleasure in hearing her defend

But you are all alike. Helstone also is proud and prejudiced. Moore, though juster and more considerate than either you or the Rector, is still haughty, stern, and in a public sense, selfish. It is well there are such men as Mr Hall to be found occasionally: men of large and kind hearts, who can love their whole race, who can forgive others for being richer, more prosperous, or more powerful than they are. Such men may have less originality, less force of character than you, but they are better friends to mankind."

"And when is it to be?" said Mr Yorke, now rising.

"When is what to be?"

"The wedding."

"Whose wedding?"

"Only that of Robert Gérard Moore, Esq., of Hollow's Cottage, with Miss Keeldar, daughter and heiress of the late Charles Cave Keeldar of Fieldhead Hall."

Shirley gazed at the questioner with rising colour; but the light in her eye was not faltering: it shone steadily—yes—it burned deeply.

"That is your revenge," she said slowly: then added; "Would it be a bad match, unworthy of the late Charles Cave Keeldar's representative?"

"My lass, Moore is a gentleman: his blood is pure and ancient as mine or thine."

"And we too set store by ancient blood? We have family pride, though one of us at least is a Republican?"

Yorke bowed as he stood before her. His lips were mute, but his eye confessed the impeachment. Yes—he had family pride—you saw it in his whole bearing.

"Moore *is* a gentleman," echoed Shirley, lifting her head with glad grace. She checked herself—words seemed crowding to her tongue, she would not give

them utterance; but her look spoke much at the moment: what——Yorke tried to read, but could not —the language was there——visible, but untranslatable —a poem—a fervid lyric in an unknown tongue. It was not a plain story, however—no simple gush of feeling—no ordinary love-confession—that was obvious; it was something other, deeper, more intricate than he guessed at: he felt his revenge had not struck home; he felt that Shirley triumphed—she held him at fault, baffled, puzzled; *she* enjoyed the moment—not *he*.

"And if Moore is a gentleman, you *can* be only a lady, therefore"——

"Therefore there would be no inequality in our union?"

"None."

"Thank you for your approbation. Will you give me away when I relinquish the name of Keeldar for that of Moore?"

Mr Yorke, instead of replying, gazed at her much puzzled. He could not divine what her look signified; whether she spoke in earnest or in jest: there was purpose and feeling, banter and scoff, playing, mingled, on her mobile lineaments.

"I don't understand thee," he said, turning away.

She laughed: "Take courage, sir; you are not singular in your ignorance: but I suppose if Moore understands me, that will do—will it not?"

"Moore may settle his own matters henceforward for me; I'll neither meddle nor make with them further."

A new thought crossed her: her countenance changed magically; with a sudden darkening of the eye, and austere fixing of the features, she demanded—"Have you been asked to interfere. Are you questioning me as another's proxy?"

"The Lord save us! Whoever weds thee must

look about him! Keep all your questions for Robert; I'll answer no more on 'em. Good-day, lassie!"

The day being fine, or at least fair—for soft clouds curtained the sun, and a dim but not chill or waterish haze slept blue on the hills—Caroline, while Shirley was engaged with her callers, had persuaded Mrs Pryor to assume her bonnet and summer shawl, and to take a walk with her up towards the narrow end of the Hollow.

Here, the opposing sides of the glen approaching each other, and becoming clothed with brushwood and stunted oaks, formed a wooded ravine; at the bottom of which ran the mill-stream, in broken unquiet course, struggling with many stones, chafing against rugged banks, fretting with gnarled tree-roots, foaming, gurgling, battling as it went. Here, when you had wandered half-a-mile from the mill, you found a sense of deep solitude: found it in the shade of unmolested trees; received it in the singing of many birds, for which that shade made a home. This was no trodden way: the freshness of the woodflowers attested that foot of man seldom pressed them: abounding wild-roses looked as if they budded, bloomed, and faded under the watch of solitude, as in a Sultan's harem. Here you saw the sweet azure of blue-bells, and recognised in pearl-white blossoms, spangling the grass, an humble type of some star-lit spot in space.

Mrs Pryor liked a quiet walk: she ever shunned highroads, and sought byways and lonely lanes: one companion she preferred to total solitude, for in solitude she was nervous; a vague fear of annoying encounters broke the enjoyment of quite lonely rambles; but she feared nothing with Caroline: when once she got away from human habitations, and entered the still demesne of nature accompanied by this one youthful friend, a propitious change seem to steal over her mind and beam in her countenance. When with Caroline—and Caro-

line only—her heart, you would have said, shook off a burden, her brow put aside a veil, her spirits too escaped from a restraint: with her she was cheerful; with her, at times, she was tender: to her she would impart her knowledge, reveal glimpses of her experience, give her opportunities for guessing what life she had lived, what cultivation her mind had received, of what calibre was her intelligence, how and where her feelings were vulnerable.

To-day, for instance, as they walked along, Mrs Pryor talked to her companion about the various birds singing in the trees, discriminated their species, and said something about their habits and peculiarities. English natural history seemed familiar to her. All the wild flowers round their path were recognised by her: tiny plants springing near stones and peeping out of chinks in old walls—plants such as Caroline had scarcely noticed before—received a name and an intimation of their properties: it appeared that she had minutely studied the botany of English fields and woods. Having reached the head of the ravine, they sat down together on a ledge of grey and mossy rock jutting from the base of a steep green hill, which towered above them: she looked round her, and spoke of the neighbourhood as she had once before seen it long ago. She alluded to its changes, and compared its aspect with that of other parts of England; revealing in quiet, unconscious touches of description, a sense of the picturesque, an appreciation of the beautiful or commonplace, a power of comparing the wild with the cultured, the grand with the tame, that gave to her discourse a graphic charm as pleasant as it was unpretending.

The sort of reverent pleasure with which Caroline listened—so sincere, so quiet, yet so evident, stirred the elder lady's faculties to a gentle animation. Rarely, probably, had she, with her chill, repellent outside—her

diffident mien and incommunicative habits, known what it was to excite in one whom she herself could love, feelings of earnest affection and admiring esteem. Delightful, doubtless, was the consciousness that a young girl towards whom it seemed—judging by the moved expression of her eyes and features—her heart turned with almost a fond impulse, looked up to her as an instructor, and clung to her as a friend. With a somewhat more marked accent of interest than she often permitted herself to use, she said, as she bent towards her youthful companion, and put aside from her forehead a pale brown curl which had strayed from the confining comb—"I do hope this sweet air blowing from the hill will do you good, my dear Caroline: I wish I could see something more of colour in these cheeks—but perhaps you were never florid?"

"I had red cheeks once," returned Miss Helstone, smiling. "I remember a year—two years ago, when I used to look in the glass, I saw a different face there to what I see now—rounder and rosier. But when we are young," added the girl of eighteen, "our minds are careless and our lives easy."

"Do you"—continued Mrs Pryor, mastering by an effort that tyrant timidity which made it difficult for her, even under present circumstances, to attempt the scrutiny of another's heart—"Do you, at your age, fret yourself with cares for the future? Believe me, you had better not: let the morrow take thought for the things of itself."

"True, dear madam: it is not over the future I pine. The evil of the day is sometimes oppressive—*too* oppressive, and I long to escape it."

"That is—the evil of the day—that is—your uncle perhaps is not—you find it difficult to understand—he does not appreciate"——

Mrs Pryor could not complete her broken sentences:

she could not manage to put the question whether Mr Helstone was too harsh with his niece, but Caroline comprehended.

"Oh, that is nothing," she replied; "my uncle and I get on very well: we never quarrel—I don't call him harsh—he never scolds me. Sometimes I wish somebody in the world loved me; but I cannot say that I particularly wish him to have more affection for me than he has. As a child, I should perhaps have felt the want of attention, only the servants were very kind to me; but when people are long indifferent to us, we grow indifferent to their indifference. It is my uncle's way not to care for women and girls—unless they be ladies that he meets in company: he could not alter, and I have no wish that he should alter, as far as I am concerned. I believe it would merely annoy and frighten me were he to be affectionate towards me now. But you know, Mrs Pryor, it is scarcely *living* to measure time as I do at the Rectory. The hours pass, and I get them over somehow, but I do not *live*. I endure existence, but I rarely enjoy it. Since Miss Keeldar and you came, I have been—I was going to say—happier, but that would be untrue." She paused.

"How, untrue? You are fond of Miss Keeldar, are you not, my dear?"

"Very fond of Shirley: I both like and admire her: but I am painfully circumstanced: for a reason I cannot explain, I want to go away from this place, and to forget it."

"You told me before you wished to be a governess; but, my dear, if you remember, I did not encourage the idea. I have been a governess myself great part of my life. In Miss Keeldar's acquaintance, I esteem myself most fortunate: her talents and her really sweet disposition have rendered my office easy to me; but when I was young, before I married, my trials were severe,

poignant. I should not like a——. I should not like you to endure similar ones. It was my lot to enter a family of considerable pretensions to good birth and mental superiority, and the members of which also believed that 'on them was perceptible' an usual endowment of the 'Christian graces;' that all their hearts were regenerate, and their spirits in a peculiar state of discipline. I was early given to understand that 'as I was not their equal,' so I could not expect 'to have their sympathy.' It was in no sort concealed from me that I was held a 'burden and a restraint in society.' The gentlemen, I found, regarded me as a 'tabooed woman,' to whom 'they were interdicted from granting the usual privileges of the sex,' and yet who 'annoyed them by frequently crossing their path.' The ladies too made it plain that they thought me 'a bore.' The servants, it was signified, 'detested me;' *why*, I could never clearly comprehend. My pupils, I was told, 'however much they might love me, and how deep soever the interest I might take in them, could not be my friends.' It was intimated that I must 'live alone, and never transgress the invisible but rigid line which established the difference between me and my employers.' My life in this house was sedentary, solitary, constrained, joyless, toilsome. The dreadful crushing of the animal spirits, the ever-prevailing sense of friendlessness and homelessness consequent on this state of things, began ere long to produce mortal effects on my constitution—I sickened. The lady of the house told me coolly I was the victim of 'wounded vanity.' She hinted, that if I did not make an effort to quell my 'ungodly discontent,' to cease 'murmuring against God's appointment,' and to cultivate the profound humility befitting my station, my mind would very likely 'go to pieces' on the rock that wrecked most of my sisterhood—morbid self-esteem; and that I should die an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

"I said nothing to Mrs Hardman; it would have been useless: but to her eldest daughter I one day dropped a few observations, which were answered thus: —There were hardships, she allowed, in the position of a governess: 'doubtless they had their trials: but,' she averred, with a manner it makes me smile now to recall—'but it must be so. *She* (Miss H.) had neither view, hope, nor *wish* to see these things remedied: for, in the inherent constitution of English habits, feelings, and prejudices, there was no possibility that they should be. Governesses,' she observed, 'must ever be kept in a sort of isolation: it is the only means of maintaining that distance which the reserve of English manners and the decorum of English families exact.'

"I remember I sighed as Miss Hardman quitted my bedside: she caught the sound, and turning, said severely—'I fear, Miss Grey, you have inherited in fullest measure the worst sin of our fallen nature—the sin of pride. You are proud, and therefore you are ungrateful too. Mamma pays you a handsome salary; and, if you had average sense, you would thankfully put up with much that is fatiguing to do and irksome to bear, since it is so well made worth your while.'

"Miss Hardman, my love, was a very strong-minded young lady, of most distinguished talents: the aristocracy are decidedly a very superior class, you know—both physically, and morally, and mentally—as a high Tory I acknowledge that;—I could not describe the dignity of her voice and mien as she addressed me thus: still, I fear, she was selfish, my dear. I would never wish to speak ill of my superiors in rank; but I think she was a little selfish."

"I remember," continued Mrs Pryor, after a pause, "another of Miss H.'s observations, which she would utter with quite a grand air. 'We, she would say,—'We need the imprudences, extravagances, mistakes,

and crimes of a certain number of fathers to sow the seed from which WE reap the harvest of governesses. The daughters of tradespeople, however well-educated, must necessarily be underbred, and as such unfit to be inmates of OUR dwellings, or guardians of OUR children's minds and persons. We shall ever prefer to place those about OUR offspring, who have been born and bred with somewhat of the same refinement as OURSELVES.'"

"Miss Hardman must have thought herself something better than her fellow-creatures, ma'am, since she held that their calamities, and even crimes, were necessary to minister to her convenience. You say she was religious: her religion must have been that of the Pharisee, who thanked God that he was not as other men are, nor even as that publican."

"My dear, we will not discuss the point: I should be the last person to wish to instil into your mind any feeling of dissatisfaction with your lot in life, or any sentiment of envy or insubordination towards your superiors. Implicit submission to authorities, scrupulous deference to our betters (under which term I, of course, include the higher classes of society) are, in my opinion, indispensable to the well-being of every community. All I mean to say, my dear, is, that you had better not attempt to be a governess, as the duties of the position would be too severe for your constitution. Not one word of disrespect would I breathe towards either Mrs or Miss Hardman; only, recalling my own experience, I cannot but feel that, were you to fall under auspices such as theirs, you would contend a while courageously with your doom: then you would pine and grow too weak for your work; you would come home—if you still had a home—broken down. Those languishing years would follow, of which none but the invalid and her immediate friends feel the heart-sickness and know

the burden: consumption or decline would close the chapter. Such is the history of many a life: I would not have it yours. My dear, we will now walk about a little, if you please."

They both rose, and slowly paced a green natural terrace bordering the chasm.

"My dear," erelong again began Mrs Pryor, a sort of timid, embarrassed abruptness marking her manner as she spoke, "the young, especially those to whom nature has been favourable—often—frequently—anticipate—look forward to—to marriage as the end, the goal of their hopes."

And she stopped. Caroline came to her relief with promptitude, showing a great deal more self-possession and courage than herself on the formidable topic now broached.

"They do; and naturally," she replied, with a calm emphasis that startled Mrs Pryor. "They look forward to marriage with some one they love as the brightest,—the only bright destiny that can await them. Are they wrong?"

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs Pryor, clasping her hands: and again she paused. Caroline turned a searching, an eager eye on the face of her friend: that face was much agitated. "My dear," she murmured, "Life is an illusion."

"But not love! Love is real: the most real, the most lasting,—the sweetest and yet the bitterest thing we know."

"My dear—it is very bitter. It is said to be strong—strong as death! Most of the cheats of existence are strong. As to their sweetness—nothing is so transitory: its date is a moment,—the twinkling of an eye: the sting remains for ever: it may perish with the dawn of eternity, but it tortures through time into its deepest night."

"Yes, it tortures through time," agreed Caroline, "except when it is mutual love."

"Mutual love! My dear, romances are pernicious. You do not read them, I hope?"

"Sometimes—whenever I can get them, indeed; but romance-writers might know nothing of love, judging by the way in which they treat of it."

"Nothing whatever, my dear!" assented Mrs Pryor eagerly; "nor of marriage; and the false pictures they give of those subjects cannot be too strongly condemned. They are not like reality: they show you only the green tempting surface of the marsh, and give not one faithful or truthful hint of the slough underneath."

"But it is not always slough," objected Caroline: "there are happy marriages. Where affection is reciprocal and sincere, and minds are harmonious, marriage *must* be happy."

"It is never wholly happy. Two people can never literally be as one: there is, perhaps, a possibility of content under peculiar circumstances, such as are seldom combined; but it is as well not to run the risk: you may make fatal mistakes. Be satisfied, my dear: let all the single be satisfied with their freedom."

"You echo my uncle's words!" exclaimed Caroline, in a tone of dismay: "you speak like Mrs Yorke, in her most gloomy moments;—like Miss Mann, when she is most sourly aud hypochondriacally disposed. This is terrible!"

"No, it is only true. Oh, child! you have only lived the pleasant morning time of life: the hot, weary noon, the sad evening, the sunless night, are yet to come for you! Mr Helstone, you say, talks as I talk; and I wonder how Mrs Matthewson Helstone would have talked had she been living. She died! She died!"

"And, alas! my own mother and father . . ." exclaimed Caroline struck by a sombre recollection.

"What of them?"

"Did I never tell you that they were separated?"

"I have heard it."

"They must then have been very miserable."

"You see all *facts* go to prove what I say."

"In this case there ought to be no such thing as marriage."

"There ought, my dear, were it only to prove that this life is a mere state of probation, wherein neither rest nor recompense is to be vouchsafed."

"But your own marriage, Mrs Pryor?"

Mrs Pryor shrunk and shuddered as if a rude finger had pressed a naked nerve: Caroline felt she had touched what would not bear the slightest contact.

"My marriage was unhappy," said the lady, summoning courage at last; "but yet"——she hesitated.

"But yet," suggested Caroline, "not immitigably wretched?"

"Not in its results, at least. No," she added, in a softer tone; "God mingles something of the balm of mercy even in vials of the most corrosive woe. He can so turn events, that from the very same blind, rash act whence sprang the curse of half our life, may flow the blessing of the remainder. Then, I am of a peculiar disposition, I own that: far from facile, without address, in some points eccentric. I ought never to have married: mine is not the nature easily to find a duplicate, or likely to assimilate with a contrast. I was quite aware of my own ineligibility; and if I had not been so miserable as a governess, I never should have married; and then"——

Caroline's eyes asked her to proceed: they entreated her to break the thick cloud of despair which her previous words had seemed to spread over life.

"And then, my dear, Mr—— that is, the gentleman I married, was, perhaps, rather an exceptional than an

average character. I hope, at least, the experience of few has been such as mine was, or that few have felt their sufferings as I felt mine. They nearly shook my mind: relief was so hopeless, redress so unattainable: but, my dear, I do not wish to dishearten, I only wish to warn you, and to prove that the single should not be too anxious to change their state, as they may change for the worse."

"Thank you, my dear madam, I quite understand your kind intentions; but there is no fear of my falling into the error to which you allude. I, at least, have no thoughts of marriage, and, for that reason, I want to make myself a position by some other means."

"My dear, listen to me. On what I am going to say, I have carefully deliberated; having, indeed, revolved the subject in my thoughts ever since you first mentioned your wish to obtain a situation. You know I at present reside with Miss Keeldar in the capacity of companion: should she marry (and that she *will* marry ere long, many circumstances induce me to conclude), I shall cease to be necessary to her in that capacity. I must tell you that I possess a small independency, arising partly from my own savings, and partly from a legacy left me some years since; whenever I leave Fieldhead, I shall take a house of my own: I could not endure to live in solitude: I have no relations whom I care to invite to close intimacy; for, as you must have observed, and as I have already avowed, my habits and tastes have their peculiarities: to you, my dear, I need not say I am attached; with you I am happier than I have ever been with any living thing" (this was said with marked emphasis). "Your society I should esteem a very dear privilege—an inestimable privilege, a comfort, a blessing. You shall come to me then. Caroline, do you refuse me? I hope you can love me?"

And with these two abrupt questions she stopped.

"Indeed, I *do* love you," was the reply. "I should like to live with you: but you are too kind."

"All I have," went on Mrs Pryor, "I would leave to you: you should be provided for, but never again say I am *too kind*. You pierce my heart, child!"

"But, my dear madam—this generosity—I have no claim"——

"Hush! you must not talk about it: there are some things we cannot bear to hear. Oh! it is late to begin, but I may yet live a few years: I can never wipe out the past, but perhaps a brief space in the future may yet be mine!"

Mrs Pryor seemed deeply agitated: large tears trembled in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Caroline kissed her, in her gentle caressing way, saying softly—"I love you dearly. Don't cry."

But the lady's whole frame seemed shaken: she sat down, bent her head to her knee, and wept aloud. Nothing could console her till the inward storm had had its way. At last the agony subsided of itself.

"Poor thing!" she murmured, returning Caroline's kiss: "poor lonely lamb! But come," she added abruptly: "come, we must go home."

For a short distance Mrs Pryor walked very fast: by degrees, however, she calmed down to her wonted manner, fell into her usual characteristic pace—a peculiar one, like all her movements—and by the time they reached Fieldhead, she had re-entered into herself: the outside was, as usual, still and shy.

Chapter xxij.

TWO LIVES.

ONLY half of Moore's activity and resolution had been seen in his defence of the mill: he showed the other half (and a terrible half it was) in the indefatigable, the relentless assiduity with which he pursued the leaders of the riot. The mob, the mere followers, he let alone: perhaps an innate sense of justice told him that men misled by false counsel, goaded by privations, are not fit objects of vengeance, and that he who would visit an even violent act on the bent head of suffering, is a tyrant, not a judge. At all events, though he knew many of the number, having recognised them during the latter part of the attack when day began to dawn, he let them daily pass him on street and road without notice or threat.

The leaders he did not know. They were strangers: emissaries from the large towns. Most of these were not members of the operative class: they were chiefly "downdraughts," bankrupts, men always in debt and often in drink—men who had nothing to lose, and much—in the way of character, cash, and cleanliness—to gain. These persons Moore hunted like any sleuth-hound; and well he liked the occupation: its excitement was of a kind pleasant to his nature: he liked it better than making cloth.

His horse must have hated these times, for it was ridden both hard and often: he almost lived on the road, and the fresh air was as welcome to his lungs as the policeman's quest to his mood: he preferred it to the steam of dye-houses. The magistrates of the district must have dreaded him: they were slow, timid men; he liked both to frighten and to rouse them. He liked to force them to betray a certain fear, which made

them alike falter in resolve and recoil in action—the fear, simply, of assassination. This, indeed, was the dread which had hitherto hampered every manufacturer —and almost every public man in the district. Helstone alone had ever repelled it. The old Cossack knew well he might be shot: he knew there was risk; but such a death had for his nerves no terrors: it would have been his chosen—might he have had a choice.

Moore likewise knew his danger: the result was an unquenchable scorn of the quarter whence such danger was to be apprehended. The consciousness that he hunted assassins was the spur in his high-mettled temper's flank. As for fear, he was too proud—too hard-natured—(if you will)—too phlegmatic a man to fear. Many a time he rode belated over moors, moonlit or moonless as the case might be, with feelings far more elate, faculties far better refreshed, than when safety and stagnation environed him in the counting-house. Four was the number of the leaders to be accounted for: two, in the course of a fortnight, were brought to bay near Stilbro'; the remaining two it was necessary to seek further off: their haunts were supposed to lie near Birmingham.

Meantime the clothier did not neglect his battered mill: its reparation was esteemed a light task; carpenters' and glaziers' work alone being needed. The rioters not having succeeded in effecting an entrance, his grim, metal darlings—the machines—had escaped damage.

Whether, during this busy life—whether, while stern justice and exacting business claimed his energies and harassed his thoughts—he now and then gave one moment, dedicated one effort, to keep alive gentler fires than those which smoulder in the fane of Nemesis, it was not easy to discover. He seldom went near Field-head; if he did, his visits were brief: if he called at the Rectory, it was only to hold conferences with the

Rector in his study. He maintained his rigid course very steadily. Meantime the history of the year continued troubled; there was no lull in the tempest of war; her long hurricane still swept the Continent. There was not the faintest sign of serene weather: no opening amid "the clouds of battle-dust and smoke;" no fall of pure dews genial to the olive; no cessation of the red rain which nourishes the baleful and glorious laurel. Meantime, Ruin had her sappers and miners at work under Moore's feet, and whether he rode or walked—whether he only crossed his counting-house hearth, or galloped over sullen Rushedge—he was aware of a hollow echo, and felt the ground shake to his tread.

While the summer thus passed with Moore, how did it lapse with Shirley and Caroline? Let us first visit the heiress. How does she look? Like a love-lorn maiden, pale and pining for a neglectful swain? Does she sit the day long bent over some sedentary task? Has she for ever a book in her hand, or sewing on her knee, and eyes only for that, and words for nothing, and thoughts unspoken?

By no means. Shirley is all right. If her wistful cast of physiognomy is not gone, no more is her careless smile. She keeps her dark old manor-house light and bright with her cheery presence: the gallery, and the low-ceiled chambers that open into it, have learned lively echoes from her voice: the dim entrance-hall, with its one window, has grown pleasantly accustomed to the frequent rustle of a silk dress, as its wearer sweeps across from room to room, now carrying flowers to the barbarous peach-bloom salon, now entering the dining-room to open its casements and let in the scent of mignonette and sweet-briar, anon bringing plants from the staircase-window to place in the sun at the open porch-door.

She takes her sewing occasionally: but, by some fatality, she is doomed never to sit steadily at it for above five minutes at a time: her thimble is scarcely fitted on, her needle scarce threaded, when a sudden thought calls her upstairs: perhaps she goes to seek some just-then-remembered old ivory-backed needle-book, or older china-topped workbox, quite unneeded, but which seems at the moment indispensable; perhaps to arrange her hair, or a drawer which she recollects to have seen that morning in a state of curious confusion; perhaps only to take a peep from a particular window at a particular view, whence Briarfield Church and Rectory are visible, pleasantly bowered in trees. She has scarcely returned, and again taken up the slip of cambric, or square of half-wrought canvas, when Tartar's bold scrape and strangled whistle are heard at the porch-door, and she must run to open it for him; it is a hot day; he comes in panting; she must convoy him to the kitchen, and see with her own eyes that his water-bowl is replenished. Through the open kitchen-door the court is visible, all sunny and gay, and peopled with turkeys and their poults, peahens and their chicks, pearl-flecked Guinea fowls, and a bright variety of pure white, and purple-necked, and blue and cinnamon-plumed pigeons. Irresistible spectacle to Shirley! She runs to the pantry for a roll, and she stands on the door-step scattering crumbs: around her throng her eager, plump, happy, feathered vassals. John is about the stables, and John must be talked to, and her mare looked at. She is still petting and patting it, when the cows come in to be milked: this is important: Shirley must stay and take a review of them all. There are perhaps some little calves, some little new-yeaned lambs —it may be twins, whose mothers have rejected them: Miss Keeldar must be introduced to them by John— must permit herself the treat of feeding them with her

own hand, under the direction of her careful foreman. Meantime, John moots doubtful questions about the farming of certain "crofts," and "ings," and "holms," and his mistress is necessitated to fetch her garden-hat —a gipsy-straw—and accompany him, over stile and along hedgerow, to hear the conclusion of the whole agricultural matter on the spot, and with the said "crofts," "ings," and "holms" under her eye. Bright afternoon thus wears into soft evening, and she comes home to a late tea, and after tea she never sews.

After tea Shirley reads, and she is just about as tenacious of her book as she is lax of her needle. Her study is the rug, her seat a footstool, or perhaps only the carpet at Mrs Pryor's feet—there she always learned her lessons when a child, and old habits have a strong power over her. The tawny and lion-like bulk of Tartar is ever stretched beside her; his negro muzzle laid on his fore-paws, straight, strong, and shapely as the limbs of an Alpine wolf. One hand of the mistress generally reposes on the loving serf's rude head, because if she takes it away he groans and is discontented. Shirley's mind is given to her book; she lifts not her eyes; she neither stirs nor speaks; unless, indeed, it be to return a brief respectful answer to Mrs Pryor, who addresses deprecatory phrases to her now and then.

"My dear, you had better not have that great dog so near you: he is crushing the border of your dress."

"Oh, it is only muslin: I can put a clean one on to-morrow."

"My dear, I wish you could acquire the habit of sitting to a table when you read."

"I will try, ma'am, some time; but it is so comfortable to do as one has always been accustomed to do."

"My dear, let me beg of you to put that book down: you are trying your eyes by the doubtful firelight."

"No, ma'am, not at all: my eyes are never tired."

At last, however, a pale light falls on the page from the window: she looks, the moon is up; she closes the volume, rises, and walks through the room. Her book has perhaps been a good one; it has refreshed, refilled, rewarmed her heart; it has set her brain astir, furnished her mind with pictures. The still parlour, the clean hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky, and showing its "sweet regent," new throned and glorious, suffice to make earth an Eden, life a poem, for Shirley. A still, deep, inborn delight glows in her young veins; unmingled—untroubled, not to be reached or ravished by human agency, because by no human agency bestowed: the pure gift of God to His creature, the free dower of Nature to her child. This joy gives her experience of a genii-life. Buoyant, by green steps, by glad hills, all verdure and light, she reaches a station scarcely lower than that whence angels looked down on the dreamer of Bethel, and her eye seeks, and her soul possesses, the vision of life as she wishes it. No—not as she wishes it; she has not time to wish: the swift glory spreads out, sweeping and kindling, and multiplies its splendour faster than Thought can effect his combinations, faster than Aspiration can utter her longings. Shirley says nothing while the trance is upon her—she is quite mute; but if Mrs Pryor speaks to her now, she goes out quietly, and continues her walk upstairs in the dim gallery.

If Shirley were not an indolent, a reckless, an ignorant being, she would take a pen at such moments; or at least while the recollection of such moments was yet fresh on her spirit: she would seize, she would fix the apparition, tell the vision revealed. Had she a little more of the organ of acquisitiveness in her head—a little more of the love of property in her nature, she would take a good-sized sheet of paper and write plainly out,

in her own queer but clear and legible hand, the story that has been narrated, the song that has been sung to her, and thus possess what she was enabled to create. But indolent she is, reckless she is, and most ignorant, for she does not know her dreams are rare—her feelings peculiar: she does not know, has never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green.

Shirley takes life easily: is not that fact written in her eye? In her good-tempered moments, is it not as full of lazy softness as in her brief fits of anger it is fulgent with quick-flashing fire? Her nature is in her eye: so long as she is calm, indolence, indulgence, humour, and tenderness possess that large grey sphere: incense her,—a red ray pierces the dew,—it quickens instantly to flame.

Ere the month of July was passed, Miss Keeldar would probably have started with Caroline on that northern tour they had planned; but just at that epoch an invasion befell Fieldhead: a genteel foraging party besieged Shirley in her castle, and compelled her to surrender at discretion. An uncle, an aunt, and two cousins from the south, a Mr, Mrs, and two Misses Sympson, of Sympson Grove, ——shire, came down upon her in state. The laws of hospitality obliged her to give in, which she did with a facility which somewhat surprised Caroline, who knew her to be prompt in action and fertile in expedient, where a victory was to be gained for her will. Miss Helstone even asked her how it was she submitted so readily?—she answered, old feelings had their power—she had passed two years of her early youth at Sympson Grove.

"How did she like her relatives?"

She had nothing in common with them, she replied: little Harry Sympson, indeed, the sole son of the family, was very unlike his sisters, and of him she had formerly

been fond; but he was not coming to Yorkshire: at least, not yet.

The next Sunday the Fieldhead pew in Briarfield Church appeared peopled with a prim, trim, fidgety, elderly gentleman, who shifted his spectacles and changed his position every three minutes; a patient, placid-looking elderly lady, in brown satin, and two pattern young ladies, in pattern attire, with pattern deportment. Shirley had the air of a black swan, or a white crow, in the midst of this party; and very forlorn was her aspect. Having brought her into respectable society, we will leave her there a while, and look after Miss Helstone.

Separated from Miss Keeldar for the present, as she could not seek her in the midst of her fine relatives; scared away from Fieldhead by the visiting commotion which the new arrivals occasioned in the neighbourhood, Caroline was limited once more to the grey Rectory; the solitary morning walk in remote by-paths; the long, lonely afternoon sitting in a quiet parlour which the sun forsook at noon, or in the garden alcove where it shone bright, yet sad, on the ripening red currants trained over the trellis, and on the fair monthly roses entwined between, and through them fell chequered on Caroline sitting in her white summer dress, still as a garden statue. There she read old books, taken from her uncle's library: the Greek and Latin were of no use to her; and its collection of light literature was chiefly contained on a shelf which had belonged to her aunt Mary: some venerable Lady's Magazines, that had once performed a sea voyage with their owner, and undergone a storm, and whose pages were stained with salt water; some mad Methodist Magazines, full of miracles and apparitions, of preternatural warnings, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticism; the equally mad Letters of Mrs Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to

the Living; a few old English Classics:—from these faded flowers Caroline had in her childhood extracted the honey,—they were tasteless to her now. By way of change, and also of doing good, she would sew: make garments for the poor, according to good Miss Ainley's direction. Sometimes, as she felt and saw her tears fall slowly on her work, she would wonder how the excellent woman who had cut it out and arranged it for her, managed to be so equably serene in *her* solitude.

"I never find Miss Ainley oppressed with despondency, or lost in grief," she thought; "yet her cottage is a still, dim little place, and she is without a bright hope or near friend in the world. I remember, though, she told me once, she had tutored her thoughts to tend upwards to Heaven. She allowed there was, and ever had been, little enjoyment in this world for her, and she looks, I suppose, to the bliss of the world to come. So do nuns—with their close cell, their iron lamp, their robe straight as a shroud, their bed narrow as a coffin. She says, often, she has no fear of death—no dread of the grave: no more, doubtless, had St Simeon Stylites, lifted up terrible on his wild column in the wilderness: no more has the Hindoo votary stretched on his couch of iron spikes. Both these having violated nature, their natural likings and antipathies are reversed: they grow altogether morbid. I do fear death as yet, but I believe it is because I am young: poor Miss Ainley would cling closer to life, if life had more charms for her. God surely did not create us, and cause us to live, with the sole end of wishing always to die. I believe, in my heart, we were intended to prize life and enjoy it, so long as we retain it. Existence never was originally meant to be that useless, blank, pale, slow-trailing thing it often becomes to many, and is becoming to me, among the rest.

"Nobody," she went on—"nobody in particular is to blame, that I can see, for the state in which things are: and I cannot tell, however much I puzzle over it, how they are to be altered for the better; but I feel there is something wrong somewhere. I believe single women should have more to do—better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now. And when I speak thus, I have no impression that I displease God by my words; that I am either impious or impatient, irreligious or sacrilegious. My consolation is, indeed, that God hears many a groan, and compassionates much grief which man stops his ears against, or frowns on with impotent contempt. I say *impotent*, for I observe that to such grievances as society cannot readily cure, it usually forbids utterance, on pain of its scorn: this scorn being only a sort of tinselled cloak to its deformed weakness. People hate to be reminded of ills they are unable or unwilling to remedy: such reminder, in forcing on them a sense of their own incapacity, or a more painful sense of an obligation to make some unpleasant effort, troubles their ease and shakes their self-complacency. Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and rich: it disturbs parents. Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood: the Armitages, the Birtwhistles, the Sykes. The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do: their sisters have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health: they are never well; and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness. The great wish—the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority

will never marry: they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen turn them into ridicule: they don't want them; they hold them very cheap: they say—I have heard them say it with sneering laughs many a time—the matrimonial market is overstocked. Fathers say so likewise, and are angry with their daughters when they observe their manœuvres: they order them to stay at home. What do they expect them to do at home? If you ask,—they would answer, sew and cook. They expect them to do this, and this only, contentedly, regularly, uncomplainingly all their lives long, as if they had no germs of faculties for anything else: a doctrine as reasonable to hold, as it would be that the fathers have no faculties but for eating what their daughters cook, or for wearing what they sew. Could men live so themselves? Would they not be very weary? And, when there came no relief to their weariness, but only reproaches at its slightest manifestation, would not their weariness ferment in time to frenzy? Lucretia, spinning at midnight in the midst of her maidens, and Solomon's virtuous woman, are often quoted as patterns of what 'the sex' (as they say) ought to be. I don't know: Lucretia, I dare say, was a most worthy sort of person, much like my cousin Hortense Moore; but she kept her servants up very late. I should not have liked to be amongst the number of the maidens. Hortense would just work me and Sarah in that fashion, if she could, and neither of us would bear it. The 'virtuous woman,' again, had her household up in the very middle of the night; she 'got breakfast over' (as Mrs Sykes says) before one o'clock A.M.; but *she* had something more to do than spin and give out portions: she was a manufacturer—she made fine linen and sold it: she was an agriculturist—she bought estates and planted vineyards. *That* woman was a manager: she was what

the matrons hereabouts call 'a clever woman.' On the whole, I like her a good deal better than Lucretia; but I don't believe either Mr Armitage or Mr Sykes could have got the advantage of her in a bargain: yet, I like her. 'Strength and honour were her clothing: the heart of her husband safely trusted in her. She opened her mouth with wisdom; in her tongue was the law of kindness: her children rose up and called her blessed; her husband also praised her.' King of Israel! your model of a woman is a worthy model! But are we, in these days, brought up to be like her? Men of Yorkshire! do your daughters reach this royal standard? Can they reach it? Can you help them to reach it? Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow? Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids,—envious, backbiting, wretched, because life is a desert to them: or, what is worst of all, reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage, which to celibacy is denied. Fathers! cannot you alter these things? Perhaps not all at once; but consider the matter well when it is brought before you, receive it as a theme worthy of thought: do not dismiss it with an idle jest or an unmanly insult You would wish to be proud of your daughters and not to blush for them—then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manœuverer, the mischief-making tale-bearer. Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered—they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you: cultivate them—give them scope and work—they will be your gayest companions in health; your tenderest nurses in sickness; your most faithful prop in age."

Chapter xxiij.

AN EVENING OUT.

ONE fine summer day that Caroline had spent entirely alone (her uncle being at Whinbury), and whose long, bright, noiseless, breezeless, cloudless hours (how many they seemed since sunrise!) had been to her as desolate as if they had gone over her head in the shadowless and trackless wastes of Zahara, instead of in the blooming garden of an English home, she was sitting in the alcove,—her task of work on her knee, her fingers assiduously plying the needle, her eyes following and regulating their movements, her brain working restlessly,—when Fanny came to the door, looked round over the lawn and borders, and not seeing her whom she sought, called out—"Miss Caroline!"

A low voice answered—"Fanny!" It issued from the alcove, and thither Fanny hastened—a note in her hand, which she delivered to fingers that hardly seemed to have nerve to hold it. Miss Helstone did not ask whence it came, and she did not look at it: she let it drop amongst the folds of her work.

"Joe Scott's son, Harry, brought it," said Fanny.

The girl was no enchantress, and knew no magic-spell, yet what she said took almost magical effect on her young mistress: she lifted her head with the quick motion of revived sensation; she shot—not a languid, but a lifelike, questioning glance at Fanny.

"Harry Scott! Who sent him?"

"He came from the Hollow."

The dropped note was snatched up eagerly—the seal was broken: it was read in two seconds. An affectionate billet from Hortense, informing her young cousin that she was returned from Wormwood Wells; that she was alone to-day, as Robert was gone to Whinbury

market; that nothing would give her greater pleasure than to have Caroline's company to tea; and—the good lady added—she was sure such a change would be most acceptable and beneficial to Caroline, who must be sadly at a loss both for safe guidance and improving society since the misunderstanding between Robert and Mr Helstone had occasioned a separation from her "meilleure amie, Hortense Gérard Moore." In a postscript, she was urged to put on her bonnet and run down directly.

Caroline did not need the injunction: glad was she to lay by the child's brown holland slip she was trimming with braid for the Jew's basket, to hasten upstairs, cover her curls with her straw bonnet, and throw round her shoulders the black silk scarf, whose simple drapery suited as well her shape as its dark hue set off the purity of her dress and the fairness of her face; glad was she to escape for a few hours the solitude, the sadness, the nightmare of her life; glad to run down the green lane sloping to the Hollow, to scent the fragrance of hedge-flowers sweeter than the perfume of moss-rose or lily. True, she knew Robert was not at the cottage; but it was delight to go where he had lately been: so long, so totally separated from him, merely to see his home, to enter the room where he had that morning sat, felt like a reunion. As such it revived her; and then Illusion was again following her in Perimask: the soft agitation of wings caressed her cheek, and the air, breathing from the blue summer sky, bore a voice which whispered—"Robert may come home while you are in his house; and then, at least, you may look in his face,—at least you may give him your hand: perhaps, for a minute, you may sit beside him."

"Silence!" was her austere response: but she loved the comforter and the consolation.

Miss Moore probably caught from the window the

gleam and flutter of Caroline's white attire through the branchy garden-shrubs, for she advanced from the cottage porch to meet her. Straight, unbending, phlegmatic as usual, she came on: no haste or ecstacy was ever permitted to disorder the dignity of *her* movements; but she smiled, well pleased to mark the delight of her pupil, to feel her kiss, and the gentle, genial strain of her embrace. She led her tenderly in—half deceived and wholly flattered. Half deceived! had it not been so, she would in all probability have put her to the wicket, and shut her out. Had she known clearly to whose account the chief share of this child-like joy was to be placed, Hortense would most likely have felt both shocked and incensed. Sisters do not like young ladies to fall in love with their brothers: it seems, if not presumptuous, silly, weak, a delusion, an absurd mistake. *They* do not love these gentlemen—whatever sisterly affection they may cherish towards them—and that others should, repels them with a sense of crude romance. The first movement, in short, excited by such discovery (as with many parents on finding their children to be in love), is one of mixed impatience and contempt. Reason—if they be rational people—corrects the false feeling in time; but if they be irrational, it is never corrected, and the daughter or sister-in-law is disliked to the end.

"You would expect to find me alone, from what I said in my note," observed Miss Moore, as she conducted Caroline towards the parlour; "but it was written this morning: since dinner, company has come in."

And, opening the door, she made visible an ample spread of crimson skirts overflowing the elbow-chair at the fireside, and above them, presiding with dignity, a cap more awful than a crown. That cap had never come to the cottage under a bonnet; no, it had been

brought, in a vast bag, or rather a middle-sized balloon of black silk, held wide with whalebone. The screed, or frill of the cap, stood a quarter of a yard broad round the face of the wearer: the ribbon, flourishing in puffs and bows about the head, was of the sort called love ribbon: there was a good deal of it,—I may say, a very great deal. Mrs Yorke wore the cap—it became her: she wore the gown also—it suited her no less.

That great lady was come in a friendly way to take tea with Miss Moore. It was almost as great and as rare a favour as if the Queen were to go uninvited to share pot-luck with one of her subjects: a higher mark of distinction she could not show,—she who, in general, scorned visiting and tea-drinking, and held cheap, and stigmatised as "gossips" every maid and matron of the vicinage.

There was no mistake, however; Miss Moore was a favourite with her: she had evinced the fact more than once; evinced it by stopping to speak to her in the churchyard on Sundays; by inviting her, almost hospitably, to come to Briarmains; evinced it to-day by the grand condescension of a personal visit. Her reasons for the preference, as assigned by herself, were, that Miss Moore was a woman of steady deportment, without the least levity of conversation or carriage; also, that, being a foreigner, she must feel the want of a friend to countenance her. She might have added, that her plain aspect, homely precise dress, and phlegmatic unattractive manner were to her so many additional recommendations. It is certain, at least, that ladies, remarkable for the opposite qualities of beauty, lively bearing, and elegant taste in attire, were not often favoured with her approbation. Whatever gentlemen are apt to admire in women, Mrs Yorke condemned; and what they overlook or despise, she patronised.

Caroline advanced to the mighty matron with some sense of diffidence: she knew little of Mrs Yorke; and, as a parson's niece, was doubtful what sort of a reception she might get. She got a very cool one, and was glad to hide her discomfiture by turning away to take off her bonnet. Nor, upon sitting down, was she displeased to be immediately accosted by a little personage in a blue frock and sash, who started up like some fairy from the side of the great dame's chair, where she had been sitting on a footstool, screened from view by the folds of the wide red gown, and running to Miss Helstone, unceremoniously threw her arms round her neck and demanded a kiss.

"My mother is not civil to you," said the petitioner, as she received and repaid a smiling salute; "and Rose, there, takes no notice of you: it is their way. If, instead of you, a white angel, with a crown of stars, had come into the room, mother would nod stiffly, and Rose never lift her head at all: but I will be your friend: I have always liked you!"

"Jessy, curb that tongue of yours, and repress your forwardness!" said Mrs Yorke.

"But, mother, you are so frozen!" expostulated Jessy. "Miss Helstone has never done you any harm: why can't you be kind to her? You sit so stiff, and look so cold, and speak so dry—what for? That's just the fashion in which you treat Miss Shirley Keeldar, and every other young lady who comes to our house. And Rose, there, is such an aut—aut——I have forgotten the word, but it means a machine in the shape of a human being. However, between you, you will drive every soul away from Briarmains—Martin often says so!"

"I am an automaton? Good! Let me alone then," said Rose, speaking from a corner where she was sitting on the carpet at the foot of a bookcase, with a

volume spread open on her knee. "Miss Helstone—how do you do?" she added, directing a brief glance to the person addressed, and then again casting down her grey, remarkable eyes on the book, and returning to the study of its pages.

Caroline stole a quiet gaze towards her, dwelling on her young, absorbed countenance, and observing a certain unconscious movement of the mouth as she read—a movement full of character. Caroline had tact, and she had fine instinct: she felt that Rose Yorke was a peculiar child—one of the unique; she knew how to treat her. Approaching quietly, she knelt on the carpet at her side, and looked over her little shoulder at her book. It was a romance of Mrs Radcliffe's—"The Italian."

Caroline read on with her, making no remark: presently Rose showed her the attention of asking, ere she turned a leaf—"Are you ready?"

Caroline only nodded.

"Do you like it?" inquired Rose, ere long.

"Long since, when I read it as a child, I was wonderfully taken with it."

"Why?"

"It seemed to open with such promise—such foreboding of a most strange tale to be unfolded."

"And in reading it, you feel as if you were far away from England—really in Italy—under another sort of sky—that blue sky of the south which travellers describe."

"You are sensible of that, Rose?"

"It makes me long to travel, Miss Helstone."

"When you are a woman, perhaps, you may be able to gratify your wish."

"I mean to make a way to do so, if one is not made for me. I cannot live always in Briarfield. The whole world is not very large compared with creation.

I must see the outside of our own round planet at least."

"How much of its outside?"

"First this hemisphere where we live; then the other. I am resolved that my life shall be a life: not a black trance like the toad's, buried in marble; nor a long, slow death like yours in Briarfield Rectory."

"Like mine! What can you mean, child?"

"Might you not as well be tediously dying, as for ever shut up in that glebe-house—a place that, when I pass it, always reminds me of a windowed grave? I never see any movement about the door: I never hear a sound from the wall: I believe smoke never issues from the chimneys. What do you do there?"

"I sew, I read, I learn lessons."

"Are you happy?"

"Should I be happier wandering alone in strange countries as you wish to do?"

"Much happier, even if you did nothing but wander. Remember, however, that I shall have an object in view: but if you only went on and on, like some enchanted lady in a fairy tale, you might be happier than now. In a day's wandering, you would pass many a hill, wood, and watercourse, each perpetually altering in aspect as the sun shone out or was overcast; as the weather was wet or fair, dark or bright. Nothing changes in Briarfield Rectory: the plaster of the parlour-ceilings, the paper on the walls, the curtains, carpets, chairs, are still the same."

"Is change necessary to happiness?"

"Yes."

"Is it synonymous with it?"

"I don't know; but I feel monotony and death to be almost the same."

Here Jessy spoke.

"Isn't she mad?" she asked.

"But, Rose," pursued Caroline, "I fear a wanderer's life, for me at least, would end like that tale you are reading—in disappointment, vanity, and vexation of spirit."

"Does 'The Italian' so end?"

"I thought so when I read it."

"Better to try all things and find all empty, than to try nothing and leave your life a blank. To do this is to commit the sin of him who buried his talent in a napkin—despicable sluggard!"

"Rose," observed Mrs Yorke, "solid satisfaction is only to be realised by doing one's duty."

"Right, mother! And if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will *not* deposit it in a broken-spouted tea-pot, and shut it up in a china-closet among tea-things. I will *not* commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woollen hose. I will *not* prison it in the linen press to find shrouds among the sheets: and least of all, mother"—(she got up from the floor)—"least of all will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder."

She stopped—then went on:—"Mother, the Lord who gave each of us our talents will come home some day, and will demand from all an account. The tea-pot, the old stocking-foot, the linen rag, the willow-pattern tureen, will yield up their barren deposit in many a house: suffer your daughters, at least, to put their money to the exchangers, that they may be enabled at the Master's coming to pay him his own with usury."

"Rose, did you bring your sampler with you, as I told you?"

"Yes, mother."

"Sit down, and do a line of marking."

Rose sat down promptly, and wrought according to orders. After a busy pause of ten minutes, her mother asked—"Do you think yourself oppressed now? A victim?"

"No, mother."

"Yet, as far as I understood your tirade, it was a protest against all womanly and domestic employment."

"You misunderstood it, mother. I should be sorry not to learn to sew: you do right to teach me, and to make me work."

"Even to the mending of your brothers' stockings and the making of sheets?"

"Yes."

"Where is the use of ranting and spouting about it, then?"

"Am I to do nothing but that? I will do that, and then I will do more. Now, mother, I have said my say. I am twelve years old at present, and not till I am sixteen will I speak again about talents: for four years, I bind myself an industrious apprentice to all you can teach me."

"You see what my daughters are, Miss Helstone," observed Mrs Yorke: "how precociously wise in their own conceits! 'I would rather this—I prefer that;' such is Jessy's cuckoo-song: while Rose utters the bolder cry, 'I *will*, and I will *not*!'"

"I render a reason, mother: besides, if my cry is bold, it is only heard once in a twelvemonth. About each birthday, the spirit moves me to deliver one oracle respecting my own instruction and management: I utter it and leave it; it is for you, mother, to listen or not."

"I would advise all young ladies," pursued Mrs Yorke, "to study the characters of such children as they chance to meet with before they marry, and have any of their own; to consider well how they would

like the responsibility of guiding the careless, the labour of persuading the stubborn, the constant burden and task of training the best."

"But with love it need not be so very difficult," interposed Caroline. "Mothers love their children most dearly—almost better than they love themselves."

"Fine talk! Very sentimental! There is the rough, practical part of life yet to come for you, young Miss!"

"But, Mrs Yorke, if I take a little baby into my arms—any poor woman's infant for instance,—I feel that I love that helpless thing quite peculiarly, though I am not its mother. I could do almost anything for it willingly, if it were delivered over entirely to my care —if it were quite dependent on me."

"You *feel!* Yes! yes! I daresay, now: you are led a great deal by your *feelings*, and you think yourself a very sensitive, refined personage, no doubt. Are you aware that, with all these romantic ideas, you have managed to train your features into an habitually lackadaisical expression, better suited to a novel-heroine than to a woman who is to make her way in the real world by dint of common sense?"

"No; I am not at all aware of that, Mrs Yorke."

"Look in the glass just behind you. Compare the face you see there with that of any early-rising, hard-working milkmaid."

"My face is a pale one, but it is *not* sentimental, and most milkmaids, however red and robust they may be, are more stupid and less practically fitted to make their way in the world than I am. I think more and more correctly than milkmaids in general do; consequently, where they would often, for want of reflection, act weakly, I, by dint of reflection, should act judiciously."

"Oh, no! you would be influenced by your feelings. You would be guided by impulse."

"Of course, I should often be influenced by my feelings: they were given me to that end. Whom my feelings teach me to love, I *must* and *shall* love; and I hope, if ever I have a husband and children, my feelings will induce me to love them. I hope, in that case, all my impulses will be strong in compelling me to love."

Caroline had a pleasure in saying this with emphasis: she had a pleasure in daring to say it in Mrs Yorke's presence. She did not care what unjust sarcasm might be hurled at her in reply: she flushed, not with anger, but excitement, when the ungenial matron answered coolly—"Don't waste your dramatic effects. That was well said,—it was quite fine; but it is lost on two women—an old wife and an old maid: there should have been a disengaged gentleman present. Is Mr Robert nowhere hid behind the curtains, do you think, Miss Moore?"

Hortense, who during the chief part of the conversation had been in the kitchen superintending the preparations for tea, did not yet quite comprehend the drift of the discourse. She answered with a puzzled air, that Robert was at Whinbury. Mrs Yorke laughed her own peculiar short laugh.

"Straightforward Miss Moore!" said she patronisingly. "It is like you to understand my question so literally, and answer it so simply. *Your* mind comprehends nothing of intrigue. Strange things might go on around you without your being the wiser: you are not of the class the world calls sharp-witted."

These equivocal compliments did not seem to please Hortense. She drew herself up, puckered her black eyebrows, but still looked puzzled.

"I have ever been noted for sagacity and discernment from childhood," she returned: for, indeed, on the possession of these qualities she peculiarly piqued herself.

"You never plotted to win a husband, I'll be bound," pursued Mrs Yorke; "and you have not the benefit of previous experience to aid you in discovering when others plot."

Caroline felt this kind language where the benevolent speaker intended she should feel it—in her very heart. She could not even parry the shafts: she was defenceless for the present: to answer would have been to avow that the cap fitted. Mrs Yorke, looking at her as she sat with troubled downcast eyes, and cheek burning painfully, and figure expressing in its bent attitude and unconscious tremor all the humiliation and chagrin she experienced, felt the sufferer was fair game. The strange woman had a natural antipathy to a shrinking, sensitive character—a nervous temperament: nor was a pretty, delicate, and youthful face a passport to her affections. It was seldom she met with all these obnoxious qualities combined in one individual: still more seldom she found that individual at her mercy, under circumstances in which she could crush her well. She happened, this afternoon, to be specially bilious and morose: as much disposed to gore as any vicious "mother of the herd:" lowering her large head, she made a new charge.

"Your cousin Hortense is an excellent sister, Miss Helstone: such ladies as come to try their life's luck here, at Hollow's Cottage, may, by a very little clever female artifice, cajole the mistress of the house, and have the game all in their own hands. You are fond of your cousin's society, I daresay, Miss?"

"Of which cousin's?"

"Oh, of the lady's, *of course*."

"Hortense is, and always has been, most kind to me."

"Every sister, with an eligible single brother, is considered most kind by her spinster friends."

"Mrs Yorke," said Caroline, lifting her eyes slowly, their blue orbs at the same time clearing from trouble, and shining steady and full, while the glow of shame left her cheek, and its hue turned pale and settled: "Mrs Yorke, may I ask what you mean?"

"To give you a lesson on the cultivation of rectitude: to disgust you with craft and false sentiment."

"Do I need this lesson?"

"Most young ladies of the present day need it. You are quite a modern young lady—morbid, delicate, professing to like retirement; which implies, I suppose, that you find little worthy of your sympathies in the ordinary world. The ordinary world—every-day, honest folks—are better than you think them: much better than any bookish, romancing chit of a girl can be, who hardly ever puts her nose over her uncle, the parson's, garden wall."

"Consequently, of whom you know nothing. Excuse me,—indeed, it does not matter whether you excuse me or not—you have attacked me without provocation: I shall defend myself without apology. Of my relations with my two cousins, you are ignorant: in a fit of ill-humour you have attempted to poison them by gratuitous insinuations, which are far more crafty and false than anything with which you can justly charge me. That I happen to be pale, and sometimes to look diffident, is no business of yours. That I am fond of books, and indisposed for common gossip, is still less your business. That I am a 'romancing chit of a girl,' is a mere conjecture on your part: I never romanced to you, nor to anybody you know. That I am the parson's niece is not a crime, though you may be narrow-minded enough to think it so. You dislike me: you have no just reason for disliking me; therefore keep the expression of your aversion to yourself. If at any time, in future, you evince it annoyingly, I

shall answer even less scrupulously than I have done now."

She ceased, and sat in white and still excitement. She had spoken in the clearest of tones, neither fast nor loud; but her silver accent thrilled the ear. The speed of the current in her veins was just then as swift as it was viewless.

Mrs Yorke was not irritated at the reproof, worded with a severity so simple, dictated by a pride so quiet. Turning coolly to Miss Moore, she said, nodding her cap approvingly—"She has spirit in her, after all. Always speak as honestly as you have done just now," she continued, "and you'll do."

"I repel a recommendation so offensive," was the answer, delivered in the same pure key, with the same clear look. "I reject counsel poisoned by insinuation. It is my right to speak as I think proper: nothing binds me to converse as you dictate. So far from always speaking as I have done just now, I shall never address any one in a tone so stern, or in language so harsh, unless in answer to unprovoked insult."

"Mother, you have found your match," pronounced little Jessy, whom the scene appeared greatly to edify. Rose had heard the whole with an unmoved face. She now said, "No: Miss Helstone is not my mother's match—for she allows herself to be vexed: my mother would wear her out in a few weeks. Shirley Keeldar manages better. Mother, you have never hurt Miss Keeldar's feelings yet. She wears armour under her silk dress that you cannot penetrate."

Mrs Yorke often complained that her children were mutinous. It was strange, that with all her strictness, with all her "strong-mindedness," she could gain no command over them: a look from their father had more influence with them than a lecture from her.

Miss Moore—to whom the position of witness to an

altercation in which she took no part was highly displeasing, as being an unimportant secondary post—now, rallying her dignity, prepared to utter a discourse which was to prove both parties in the wrong, and to make it clear to each disputant that she had reason to be ashamed of herself, and ought to submit humbly to the superior sense of the individual then addressing her. Fortunately for her audience, she had not harangued above ten minutes, when Sarah's entrance with the tea-tray called her attention, first, to the fact of that damsel having a gilt comb in her hair, and a red necklace round her throat, and secondly, and subsequently to a pointed remonstrance, to the duty of making tea. After the meal, Rose restored her to good humour by bringing her guitar and asking for a song, and afterwards engaging her in an intelligent and sharp cross-examination about guitar-playing and music in general.

Jessy, meantime, directed her assiduities to Caroline. Sitting on a stool at her feet, she talked to her, first about religion and then about politics. Jessy was accustomed at home to drink in a great deal of what her father said on these subjects, and afterwards in company to retail, with more wit and fluency than consistency or discretion, his opinions, antipathies, and preferences. She rated Caroline soundly for being a member of the Established Church, and for having an uncle a clergyman. She informed her that she lived on the country, and ought to work for her living honestly, instead of passing a useless life, and eating the bread of idleness in the shape of tithes. Thence Jessy passed to a review of the Ministry at that time in office, and a consideration of its deserts. She made familiar mention of the names of Lord Castlereagh and Mr Perceval. Each of these personages she adorned with a character that might have separately suited Moloch and Belial. She denounced the war as wholesale murder, and Lord Wellington as a "hired butcher."

Her auditress listened with exceeding edification. Jessy had something of the genius of humour in her nature: it was inexpressibly comic to hear her repeating her sire's denunciations in her nervous northern Doric; as hearty a little Jacobin as ever pent a free mutinous spirit in a muslin frock and sash. Not malignant by nature, her language was not so bitter as it was racy, and the expressive little face gave a piquancy to every phrase which held a beholder's interest captive.

Caroline chid her when she abused Lord Wellington; but she listened delighted to a subsequent tirade against the Prince Regent. Jessy quickly read in the sparkle of her hearer's eye, and the laughter hovering round her lips, that at last she had hit on a topic that pleased. Many a time had she heard the fat "Adonis of fifty" discussed at her father's breakfast-table, and she now gave Mr Yorke's comments on the theme—genuine as uttered by his Yorkshire lips.

But, Jessy, I will write about you no more. This is an autumn evening, wet and wild. There is only one cloud in the sky; but it curtains it from pole to pole. The wind cannot rest: it hurries sobbing over hills of sullen outline, colourless with twilight and mist. Rain has beat all day on that church tower: it rises dark from the stony enclosure of its graveyard: the nettles, the long grass, and the tombs all drip with wet. This evening reminds me too forcibly of another evening some years ago: a howling, rainy autumn evening too—when certain who had that day performed a pilgrimage to a grave new-made in a heretic cemetery, sat near a wood-fire on the hearth of a foreign dwelling. They were merry and social, but they each knew that a gap, never to be filled, had been made in their circle. They knew they had lost something whose absence could never be quite atoned for so long as they lived: and they knew that heavy falling rain was soaking into the wet earth

which covered their lost darling; and that the sad, sighing gale was mourning above her buried head. The fire warmed them; Life and Friendship yet blessed them; but Jessy lay cold, coffined, solitary—only the sod screening her from the storm.

Mrs Yorke folded up her knitting, cut short the music-lesson and the lecture on politics, and concluded her visit to the cottage, at an hour early enough to ensure her return to Briarmains before the blush of sunset should quite have faded in heaven, or the path up the fields have become thoroughly moist with evening dew.

The lady and her daughters being gone, Caroline felt that she also ought to resume her scarf, kiss her cousin's cheek, and trip away homeward. If she lingered much later, dusk would draw on, and Fanny would be put to the trouble of coming to fetch her: it was both baking and ironing day at the Rectory, she remembered —Fanny would be busy. Still, she could not quit her seat at the little parlour-window. From no point of view could the West look so lovely as from that lattice with the garland of jessamine round it, whose white stars and green leaves seemed now but grey pencil outlines—graceful in form, but colourless in tint—against the gold incarnadined of a summer evening—against the fire-tinged blue of an August sky, at eight o'clock P.M.

Caroline looked at the wicket-gate, beside which holly-oaks spired up tall; she looked at the close hedge of privet and laurel fencing in the garden; her eyes longed to see something more than the shrubs, before they turned from that limited prospect: they longed to see a human figure, of a certain mould and height, pass the hedge and enter the gate. A human figure she at last saw—nay, two: Frederick Murgatroyd went by, carrying a pail of water; Joe Scott followed, dangling

on his forefinger the keys of the mill. They were going to lock up mill and stables for the night, and then betake themselves home.

"So must I," thought Caroline, as she half rose and sighed.

"This is all folly—heart-breaking folly," she added. "In the first place, though I should stay till dark, there will be no arrival; because I feel in my heart, Fate has written it down in to-day's page of her eternal book, that I am not to have the pleasure I long for. In the second place, if he stepped in this moment, my presence here would be a chagrin to him, and the consciousness that it must be so would turn half my blood to ice. His hand would, perhaps, be loose and chill, if I put mine into it: his eye would be clouded if I sought its beam. I should look up for that kindling something I have seen in past days, when my face, or my language, or my disposition had at some happy moment pleased him—I should discover only darkness. I had better go home."

She took her bonnet from the table where it lay, and was just fastening the ribbon, when Hortense, directing her attention to a splendid bouquet of flowers in a glass on the same table, mentioned that Miss Keeldar had sent them that morning from Fieldhead; and went on to comment on the guests that lady was at present entertaining, on the bustling life she had lately been leading; adding divers conjectures that she did not very well like it, and much wonderment that a person who was so fond of her own way as the heiress, did not find some means of sooner getting rid of this cortège of relatives.

"But they say she actually will not let Mr Sympson and his family go," she added: "they wanted much to return to the south last week, to be ready for the reception of the only son, who is expected home from

a tour. She insists that her cousin Henry shall come and join his friends here in Yorkshire. I daresay she partly does it to oblige Robert and myself."

"How to oblige Robert and you?" inquired Caroline.

"Why, my child, you are dull. Don't you know—you must often have heard"——

"Please, ma'am," said Sarah, opening the door, "the preserves that you told me to boil in treacle—the congfiters, as you call them—is all burnt to the pan."

"Les confitures! Elles sont brûlées? Ah, quelle négligence coupable! Coquine de cuisinière — fille insupportable!"

And Mademoiselle, hastily taking from a drawer a large linen apron, and tying it over her black apron, rushed "éperdue" into the kitchen, whence—to speak truth — exhaled an odour of calcined sweets rather strong than savoury.

The mistress and maid had been in full feud the whole day, on the subject of preserving certain black cherries, hard as marbles, sour as sloes. Sarah held that sugar was the only orthodox condiment to be used in that process; Mademoiselle maintained—and proved it by the practice and experience of her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother—that treacle, "mélasse," was infinitely preferable. She had committed an imprudence in leaving Sarah in charge of the preserving-pan, for her want of sympathy in the nature of its contents had induced a degree of carelessness in watching their confection, whereof the result was—dark and cindery ruin. Hubbub followed: high upbraiding, and sobs rather loud than deep or real.

Caroline, once more turning to the little mirror, was shading her ringlets from her cheek to smooth them under her cottage bonnet, certain that it would not only be useless but unpleasant to stay longer; when, on the

sudden opening of the back-door, there fell an abrupt calm in the kitchen: the tongues were checked, pulled up as with bit and bridle. "Was it—was it—Robert?" He often—almost always—entered by the kitchen-way on his return from market. No: it was only Joe Scott, who, having hemmed significantly thrice—every hem being meant as a lofty rebuke to the squabbling womankind—said,—"Now, I thowt I heerd a crack?"

None answered.

"And," he continued pragmatically, "as t' maister's comed, and as he'll enter through this hoyle, I *con*sidered it desirable to step in and let ye know. A household o' women is nivver fit to be comed on wi'out warning. Here he is; walk forrard, sir. They war playing up queerly, but I think I've quieted 'em."

Another person—it was now audible—entered. Joe Scott proceeded with his rebukes.

"What d'ye mean by being all i' darkness? Sarah, thou quean, canst t' not light a candle? It war sundown an hour syne. He'll brak' his shins agean some o' yer pots, and tables, and stuff. Tak' tent o' this baking-bowl, sir, they've set it i' yer way, fair as if they did it i' malice."

To Joe's observations succeeded a confused sort of pause, which Caroline, though she was listening with both her ears, could not understand. It was very brief: a cry broke it—a sound of surprise, followed by the sound of a kiss: ejaculations, but half articulate, succeeded.

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Est-ce que je m'y attendais?" were the words chiefly to be distinguished.

"Et tu te portes toujours bien, bonne sœur?" inquired another voice—Robert's, certainly.

Caroline was puzzled. Obeying an impulse, the wisdom of which she had not time to question, she escaped from the little parlour, by way of leaving the

coast clear, and running upstairs took up a position at the head of the banisters, whence she could make further observations ere presenting herself. It was considerably past sunset now: dusk filled the passage, yet not such deep dusk but that she could presently see Robert and Hortense traverse it.

"Caroline! Caroline!" called Hortense, a moment afterwards, "venez voir mon frère!"

"Strange!" commented Miss Helstone, "passing strange! What does this unwonted excitement about such an everyday occurrence as a return from market portend? She has not lost her senses, has she? Surely the burnt treacle has not crazed her?"

She descended in a subdued flutter: yet more was she fluttered when Hortense seized her hand at the parlour-door, and leading her to Robert, who stood in bodily presence, tall and dark against the one window, presented her with a mixture of agitation and formality, as though they had been utter strangers, and this was their first mutual introduction.

Increasing puzzle! He bowed rather awkwardly, and turning from her with a stranger's embarrassment, he met the doubtful light from a window: it fell on his face, and the enigma of the dream (a dream it seemed) was at its height: she saw a visage like and unlike,—Robert, and no Robert.

"What is the matter?" said Caroline. "Is my sight wrong? Is it my cousin?"

"Certainly, it is your cousin," asserted Hortense.

Then who was this now coming through the passage, —now entering the room? Caroline, looking round, met a new Robert,—the real Robert, as she felt at once.

"Well," said he, smiling at her questioning, astonished face, "which is which?"

"Ah! this is *you!*" was the answer.

He laughed. "I believe it is *me:* and do you know who *he* is? You never saw him before; but you have heard of him."

She had gathered her senses now.

"It *can* be only one person: your brother, since it is so like you: my other cousin, Louis."

"Clever little Œdipus!—you would have baffled the Sphynx!—but now, see us together. Change places. Change again, to confuse her, Louis.—Which is the old love now, Lina?"

"As if it were possible to make a mistake when you speak! You should have told Hortense to ask. But you are not so much alike: it is only your height, your figure, and complexion that are so similar."

"And I am Robert, am I not?" asked the newcomer, making a first effort to overcome what seemed his natural shyness.

Caroline shook her head gently. A soft, expressive ray from her eye beamed on the real Robert: it said much.

She was not permitted to quit her cousins soon: Robert himself was peremptory in obliging her to remain. Glad, simple, and affable in her demeanour (glad for this night, at least), in light, bright spirits for the time, she was too pleasant an addition to the cottage circle to be willingly parted with by any of them. Louis seemed naturally rather a grave, still, retiring man, but the Caroline of this evening, which was not (as you know, reader) the Caroline of every day, thawed his reserve, and cheered his gravity soon. He sat near her, and talked to her. She already knew his vocation was that of tuition; she learned now he had for some years been the tutor of Mr Sympson's son; that he had been travelling with him, and had accompanied him to the north. She inquired if he liked his post, but got a look in reply which did not

invite or license further question. The look woke Caroline's ready sympathy: she thought it a very sad expression to pass over so sensible a face as Louis's: for he *had* a sensible face,—though not handsome, she considered, when seen near Robert's. She turned to make the comparison. Robert was leaning against the wall, a little behind her, turning over the leaves of a book of engravings, and probably listening, at the same time, to the dialogue between her and Louis.

"How could I think them alike?" she asked herself: "I see now it is Hortense Louis resembles, not Robert."

And this was in part true: he had the shorter nose and longer upper-lip of his sister, rather than the fine traits of his brother: he had her mould of mouth and chin—all less decisive, accurate, and clear than those of the young mill-owner. His air, though deliberate and reflective, could scarcely be called prompt and acute. You felt, in sitting near and looking up at him, that a slower and probably a more benignant nature than that of the elder Moore shed calm on your impressions.

Robert—perhaps aware that Caroline's glance had wandered towards and dwelt upon him, though he had neither met nor answered it—put down the book of engravings, and approaching, took a seat at her side. She resumed her conversation with Louis, but, while she talked to him, her thoughts were elsewhere: her heart beat on the side from which her face was half-averted. She acknowledged a steady, manly, kindly air in Louis; but she bent before the secret power of Robert. To be so near him—though he was silent—though he did not touch so much as her scarf-fringe, or the white hem of her dress—affected her like a spell. Had she been obliged to speak to him *only*, it would have quelled—but, at liberty to address another, it excited her. Her discourse flowed freely: it was gay, playful, eloquent.

The indulgent look and placid manner of her auditor encouraged her to ease; the sober pleasure expressed by his smile drew out all that was brilliant in her nature. She felt that this evening she appeared to advantage, and, as Robert was a spectator, the consciousness contented her: had he been called away, collapse would at once have succeeded stimulus.

But her enjoyment was not long to shine full-orbed: a cloud soon crossed it.

Hortense, who for some time had been on the move ordering supper, and was now clearing the little table of some books, &c., to make room for the tray, called Robert's attention to the glass of flowers, the carmine, and snow, and gold of whose petals looked radiant indeed by candlelight.

"They came from Fieldhead," she said, "intended as a gift to you, no doubt: we know who is the favourite there—not I, I'm sure."

It was a wonder to hear Hortense jest; a sign that her spirits were at high-water mark indeed.

"We are to understand, then, that Robert is the favourite?" observed Louis.

"Mon cher," replied Hortense, "Robert—c'est tout ce qu'il y a de plus précieux au monde: à côté de lui, le reste du genre humain n'est que du rebut. N'ai-je pas raison, mon enfant?" she added, appealing to Caroline.

Caroline was obliged to reply, "Yes"—and her beacon was quenched: her star withdrew as she spoke.

"Et toi, Robert?" inquired Louis.

"When you shall have an opportunity, ask herself," was the quiet answer. Whether he reddened or paled Caroline did not examine: she discovered it was late, and she must go home. Home she would go: not even Robert could detain her now.

Chapter xxiv.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

THE future sometimes seems to sob a low warning of the events it is bringing us, like some gathering though yet remote storm, which, in tones of the wind, in flushings of the firmament, in clouds strangely torn, announces a blast strong to strew the sea with wrecks; or commissioned to bring in fog the yellow taint of pestilence, covering white Western isles with the poisoned exhalations of the East, dimming the lattices of English homes with the breath of Indian plague. At other times this Future bursts suddenly, as if a rock had rent, and in it a grave had opened, whence issues the body of one that slept. Ere you are aware you stand face to face with a shrouded and unthought-of Calamity—a new Lazarus.

Caroline Helstone went home from Hollow's Cottage in good health, as she imagined. On waking the next morning she felt oppressed with unwonted languor: at breakfast, at each meal of the following day, she missed all sense of appetite: palatable food was as ashes and sawdust to her.

"Am I ill?" she asked, and looked at herself in the glass. Her eyes were bright, their pupils dilated, her cheeks seemed rosier and fuller than usual. "I look well; why can I not eat?"

She felt a pulse beat fast in her temples: she felt, too, her brain in strange activity: her spirits were raised; hundreds of busy and broken, but brilliant thoughts engaged her mind: a glow rested on them, such as tinged her complexion.

Now followed a hot, parched, thirsty, restless night. Towards morning one terrible dream seized her like a tiger: when she woke, she felt and knew she was ill.

How she had caught the fever (fever it was), she could not tell. Probably in her late walk home, some sweet, poisoned breeze, redolent of honey-dew and miasma, had passed into her lungs and veins, and finding there already a fever of mental excitement, and a languor of long conflict and habitual sadness, had fanned the spark of flame, and left a well-lit fire behind it.

It seemed, however, but a gentle fire: after two hot days and worried nights, there was no violence in the symptoms, and neither her uncle, nor Fanny, nor the doctor, nor Miss Keeldar, when she called, had any fear for her: a few days would restore her, every one believed.

The few days passed, and—though it was still thought it could not long delay—the revival had not begun. Mrs Pryor, who had visited her daily—being present in her chamber one morning when she had been ill a fortnight—watched her very narrowly for some minutes: she took her hand, and placed her finger on her wrist; then, quietly leaving the chamber, she went to Mr Helstone's study. With him she remained closeted a long time—half the morning. On returning to her sick young friend, she laid aside shawl and bonnet: she stood a while at the bedside, one hand placed in the other, gently rocking herself to and fro, in an attitude and with a movement habitual to her. At last she said—"I have sent Fanny to Fieldhead to fetch a few things for me, such as I shall want during a short stay here: it is my wish to remain with you till you are better. Your uncle kindly permits my attendance: will it to yourself be acceptable, Caroline?"

"I am sorry you should take such needless trouble. I do not feel very ill, but I cannot refuse resolutely: it will be such comfort to know you are in the house, to see you sometimes in the room; but don't confine your-

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self on my account, dear Mrs Pryor. Fanny nurses me very well."

Mrs Pryor—bending over the pale little sufferer—was now smoothing the hair under her cap, and gently raising her pillow. As she performed these offices, Caroline, smiling, lifted her face to kiss her.

"Are you free from pain? Are you tolerably at ease?" was inquired in a low, earnest voice, as the self-elected nurse yielded to the caress.

"I think I am almost happy."

"You wish to drink? Your lips are parched."

She held a glass filled with some cooling beverage to her mouth.

"Have you eaten anything to-day, Caroline?"

"I cannot eat."

"But soon your appetite will return: it *must* return: that is, I pray God it may!"

In laying her again on the couch, she encircled her in her arms; and while so doing, by a movement which seemed scarcely voluntary, she drew her to her heart, and held her close gathered an instant.

"I shall hardly wish to get well, that I may keep you always," said Caroline.

Mrs Pryor did not smile at this speech: over her features ran a tremor, which for some minutes she was absorbed in repressing.

"You are more used to Fanny than to me," she remarked, ere long. "I should think my attendance must seem strange, officious?"

"No: quite natural, and very soothing. You must have been accustomed to wait on sick people, ma'am. You move about the room so softly, and you speak so quietly, and touch me so gently."

"I am dexterous in nothing, my dear. You will often find me awkward, but never negligent."

Negligent, indeed, she was not. From that hour,

Fanny and Eliza became ciphers in the sick room: Mrs Pryor made it her domain: she performed all its duties; she lived in it day and night. The patient remonstrated—faintly, however, from the first, and not at all ere long: loneliness and gloom were now banished from her bedside; protection and solace sat there instead. She and her nurse coalesced in wondrous union. Caroline was usually pained to require or receive much attendance: Mrs Pryor, under ordinary circumstances, had neither the habit nor the art of performing little offices of service; but all now passed with such ease—so naturally, that the patient was as willing to be cherished as the nurse was bent on cherishing; no sign of weariness in the latter ever reminded the former that she ought to be anxious. There was, in fact, no very hard duty to perform; but a hireling might have found it hard.

With all this care, it seemed strange the sick girl did not get well; yet such was the case: she wasted like any snow-wreath in thaw; she faded like any flower in drought. Miss Keeldar, on whose thoughts danger or death seldom intruded, had at first entertained no fears at all for her friend; but seeing her change and sink from time to time when she paid her visits, alarm clutched her heart. She went to Mr Helstone and expressed herself with so much energy, that that gentleman was at last obliged, however unwillingly, to admit the idea that his niece was ill of something more than a migraine; and when Mrs Pryor came and quietly demanded a physician, he said she might send for two if she liked. One came, but that one was an oracle: he delivered a dark saying of which the future was to solve the mystery, wrote some prescriptions, gave some directions—the whole with an air of crushing authority—pocketed his fee, and went. Probably, he knew well enough he could do no good; but didn't like to say so.

Still, no rumour of serious illness got wind in the neighbourhood. At Hollow's Cottage it was thought that Caroline had only a severe cold, she having written a note to Hortense to that effect; and Mademoiselle contented herself with sending two pots of currant jam, a receipt for a tisane, and a note of advice.

Mrs Yorke being told that a physician had been summoned, sneered at the hypochondriac fancies of the rich and idle, who, she said, having nothing but themselves to think about, must needs send for a doctor if only so much as their little finger ached.

The "rich and idle," represented in the person of Caroline, were meantime falling fast into a condition of prostration, whose quickly consummated debility puzzled all who witnessed it, except one; for that one alone reflected how liable is the undermined structure to sink in sudden ruin.

Sick people often have fancies inscrutable to ordinary attendants, and Caroline had one which even her tender nurse could not at first explain. On a certain day in the week, at a certain hour, she would—whether worse or better—entreat to be taken up and dressed, and suffered to sit in her chair near the window. This station she would retain till noon was past: whatever degree of exhaustion or debility her wan aspect betrayed, she still softly put off all persuasion to seek repose until the church-clock had duly tolled mid-day: the twelve strokes sounded, she grew docile, and would meekly lie down. Returned to the couch, she usually buried her face deep in the pillow, and drew the coverlets close round her, as if to shut out the world and sun, of which she was tired: more than once, as she thus lay, a slight convulsion shook the sick-bed, and a faint sob broke the silence round it. These things were not unnoted by Mrs Pryor.

One Tuesday morning, as usual, she had asked leave

to rise, and now she sat wrapped in her white dressing-gown, leaning forward in the easy-chair, gazing steadily and patiently from the lattice. Mrs Pryor was seated a little behind, knitting as it seemed, but, in truth, watching her. A change crossed her pale mournful brow, animating its languor; a light shot into her faded eyes, reviving their lustre; she half rose and looked earnestly out. Mrs Pryor, drawing softly near, glanced over her shoulder. From this window was visible the churchyard, beyond it the road, and there, riding sharply by, appeared a horseman. The figure was not yet too remote for recognition; Mrs Pryor had long sight; she knew Mr Moore. Just as an intercepting rising ground concealed him from view, the clock struck twelve.

"May I lie down again?" asked Caroline.

Her nurse assisted her to bed: having laid her down and drawn the curtain, she stood listening near. The little couch trembled, the suppressed sob stirred the air. A contraction as of anguish altered Mrs Pryor's features; she wrung her hands; half a groan escaped her lips. She now remembered that Tuesday was Whinbury market-day: Mr Moore must always pass the Rectory on his way thither, just ere noon of that day.

Caroline wore continually round her neck a slender braid of silk, attached to which was some trinket. Mrs Pryor had seen the bit of gold glisten; but had not yet obtained a fair view of it. Her patient never parted with it: when dressed it was hidden in her bosom; as she lay in bed she always held it in her hand. That Tuesday afternoon the transient doze — more like lethargy than sleep—which sometimes abridged the long days, had stolen over her: the weather was hot: while turning in febrile restlessness, she had pushed the coverlets a little aside; Mrs Pryor bent to replace them; the small, wasted hand, lying nerveless on the sick girl's

breast, clasped as usual her jealously-guarded treasure: those fingers whose attenuation it gave pain to see, were now relaxed in sleep: Mrs Pryor gently disengaged the braid, drawing out a tiny locket—a slight thing it was, such as it suited her small purse to purchase: under its crystal face appeared a curl of black hair—too short and crisp to have been severed from a female head.

Some agitated movement occasioned a twitch of the silken chain: the sleeper started and woke. Her thoughts were usually now somewhat scattered on waking; her look generally wandering. Half-rising, as if in terror, she exclaimed—"Don't take it from me, Robert! Don't! It is my last comfort—let me keep it. I never tell any one whose hair it is—I never show it."

Mrs Pryor had already disappeared behind the curtain: reclining far back in a deep arm-chair by the bedside, she was withdrawn from view. Caroline looked abroad into the chamber: she thought it empty. As her stray ideas returned slowly, each folding its weak wings on the mind's sad shore, like birds exhausted,—beholding void, and perceiving silence round her, she believed herself alone. Collected, she was not yet: perhaps healthy self-possession and self-control were to be hers no more; perhaps that world the strong and prosperous live in had already rolled from beneath her feet for ever: so, at least, it often seemed to herself. In health, she had never been accustomed to think aloud; but now words escaped her lips unawares.

"Oh! I *should* see him once more before all is over! Heaven *might* favour me thus far?" she cried. "God grant me a little comfort before I die!" was her humble petition.

"But he will not know I am ill till I am gone; and he will come when they have laid me out, and I am senseless, cold, and stiff.

"What can my departed soul feel then? Can it see or know what happens to the clay? Can spirits, through any medium, communicate with living flesh? Can the dead at all revisit those they leave? Can they come in the elements? Will wind, water, fire, lend me a path to Moore?

"Is it for nothing the wind sounds almost articulately sometimes—sings as I have lately heard it sing at night—or passes the casement sobbing, as if for sorrow to come? Does nothing, then, haunt it—nothing inspire it?

"Why, it suggested to me words one night: it poured a strain which I could have written down, only I was appalled, and dared not rise to seek pencil and paper by the dim watch-light.

"What is that electricity they speak of, whose changes make us well or ill; whose lack or excess blasts; whose even balance revives? What are all those influences that are about us in the atmosphere, that keep playing over our nerves like fingers on stringed instruments, and call forth now a sweet note, and now a wail—now an exultant swell, and, anon, the saddest cadence?

"*Where is* the other world? In *what* will another life consist? Why do I ask? Have I not cause to think that the hour is hasting but too fast when the veil must be rent for me? Do I not know the Grand Mystery is likely to burst prematurely on me? Great Spirit! in whose goodness I confide; whom, as my Father, I have petitioned night and morning from early infancy, help the weak creation of Thy hands! Sustain me through the ordeal I dread and must undergo! Give me strength! Give me patience! Give me—oh! *give me* FAITH!"

She fell back on her pillow. Mrs Pryor found means to steal quietly from the room: she re-entered

it soon after, apparently as composed as if she had really not overheard this strange soliloquy.

The next day several callers came. It had become known that Miss Helstone was worse. Mr Hall and his sister Margaret arrived: both, after they had been in the sick-room, quitted it in tears; they had found the patient more altered than they expected. Hortense Moore came. Caroline seemed stimulated by her presence: she assured her, smiling, she was not dangerously ill; she talked to her in a low voice, but cheerfully: during her stay, excitement kept up the flush of her complexion: she looked better.

"How is Mr Robert?" asked Mrs Pryor, as Hortense was preparing to take leave.

"He was very well when he left."

"Left! Is he gone from home?"

It was then explained that some police intelligence about the rioters of whom he was in pursuit, had, that morning, called him away to Birmingham, and probably a fortnight might elapse ere he returned.

"He is not aware that Miss Helstone is very ill?"

"Oh! no. He thought, like me, that she had only a bad cold."

After this visit, Mrs Pryor took care not to approach Caroline's couch for above an hour: she heard her weep, and dared not look on her tears.

As evening closed in, she brought her some tea. Caroline, opening her eyes from a moment's slumber, viewed her nurse with an unrecognising glance.

"I smelt the honeysuckles in the glen this summer morning," she said, "as I stood at the counting-house window."

Strange words like these from pallid lips pierce a loving listener's heart more poignantly than steel. They sound romantic, perhaps, in books: in real life, they are harrowing.

"My darling, do you know me?" said Mrs Pryor.

"I went in to call Robert to breakfast: I have been with him in the garden: he asked me to go: a heavy dew has refreshed the flowers: the peaches are ripening."

"My darling! my darling!" again and again repeated the nurse.

"I thought it was daylight—long after sunrise: it looks dark—is the moon now set?"

That moon, lately risen, was gazing full and mild upon her: floating in deep blue space, it watched her unclouded.

"Then it is not morning? I am not at the cottage? Who is this?—I see a shape at my bedside."

"It is myself—it is your friend—your nurse—your —— Lean your head on my shoulder: collect yourself." (In a lower tone.) "O God, take pity! Give *her* life, and *me* strength! Send me courage—teach me words!"

Some minutes passed in silence. The patient lay mute and passive in the trembling arms—on the throbbing bosom of the nurse.

"I am better now," whispered Caroline at last, "much better—I feel where I am: this is Mrs Pryor near me: I was dreaming—I talk when I wake up from dreams: people often do in illness. How fast your heart beats, ma'am! Do not be afraid."

"It is not fear, child; only a little anxiety, which will pass. I have brought you some tea, Cary; your uncle made it himself. You know he says he can make a better cup of tea than any housewife can. Taste it. He is concerned to hear that you eat so little: he would be glad if you had a better appetite."

"I am thirsty: let me drink."

She drank eagerly.

"What o'clock is it, ma'am?" she asked.

"Past nine."

"Not later? Oh! I have yet a long night before me: but the tea has made me strong: I will sit up."

Mrs Pryor raised her, and arranged her pillows.

"Thank Heaven! I am not always equally miserable, and ill, and hopeless. The afternoon has been bad since Hortense went: perhaps the evening may be better. It is a fine night, I think? The moon shines clear."

"Very fine: a perfect summer night. The old church-tower gleams white almost as silver."

"And does the churchyard look peaceful?"

"Yes, and the garden also: dew glistens on the foliage."

"Can you see many long weeds and nettles amongst the graves; or do they look turfy and flowery?"

"I see closed daisy-heads, gleaming like pearls on some mounds. Thomas has mown down the dock-leaves and rank grass, and cleared all away."

"I always like that to be done: it soothes one's mind to see the place in order: and, I dare say, within the church just now that moonlight shines as softly as in my room. It will fall through the east window full on the Helstone monument. When I close my eyes I seem to see poor papa's epitaph in black letters on white marble. There is plenty of room for other inscriptions underneath."

"William Farren came to look after your flowers this morning: he was afraid, now you cannot tend them yourself, they would be neglected. He has taken two of your favourite plants home to nurse for you."

"If I were to make a will, I would leave William all my plants; Shirley my trinkets—except one, which must not be taken off my neck; and you, ma'am, my books." (After a pause.) "Mrs Pryor, I feel a longing wish for something."

"For what, Caroline?"

"You know I always delight to hear you sing: sing me a hymn just now: sing that hymn which begins—

"'Our God, our help in ages past,—
Our hope for years to come;
Our shelter from the stormy blast;
Our refuge, haven, home!'"

Mrs Pryor at once complied.

No wonder Caroline liked to hear her sing: her voice, even in speaking, was sweet and silver clear; in song it was almost divine: neither flute nor dulcimer has tones so pure. But the tone was secondary compared to the expression which trembled through: a tender vibration from a feeling heart.

The servants in the kitchen, hearing the strain, stole to the stair-foot to listen: even old Helstone, as he walked in the garden, pondering over the unaccountable and feeble nature of women, stood still amongst his borders to catch the mournful melody more distinctly. Why it reminded him of his forgotten dead wife, he could not tell; nor why it made him more concerned than he had hitherto been for Caroline's fading girlhood. He was glad to recollect that he had promised to pay Wynne, the magistrate, a visit that evening. Low spirits and gloomy thoughts were very much his aversion: when they attacked him he usually found means to make them march in double-quick time. The hymn followed him faintly as he crossed the fields: he hastened his customary sharp pace, that he might get beyond its reach.

"Thy word commands our flesh to dust,—
'Return, ye sons of men;'
All nations rose from earth at first,
And turn to earth again.

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

Like flowery fields, the nations stand,
Fresh in the morning light;
The flowers beneath the mower's hand
Lie withering ere 'tis night.

Our God, our help in ages past,—
Our hope for years to come;
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,—
O Father, be our home!"

"Now sing a song—a Scottish song," suggested Caroline when the hymn was over,—"'Ye banks and braes o' bonny Doon.'"

Again Mrs Pryor obeyed, or essayed to obey. At the close of the first stanza she stopped: she could get no further: her full heart flowed over.

"You are weeping at the pathos of the air: come here, and I will comfort you," said Caroline, in a pitying accent. Mrs Pryor came: she sat down on the edge of her patient's bed, and allowed the wasted arms to encircle her.

"You often soothe me, let me soothe you," murmured the young girl, kissing her cheek. "I hope," she added, "it is not for me you weep?"

No answer followed.

"Do you think I shall not get better? I do not feel *very* ill—only weak."

"But your mind, Caroline: your mind is crushed: your heart is almost broken, you have been so neglected, so repulsed, left so desolate."

"I believe grief is, and always has been, my worst ailment. I sometimes think, if an abundant gush of happiness came on me, I could revive yet."

"Do you wish to live?"

"I have no object in life."

"You love me, Caroline?"

"Very much,—very truly,—inexpressibly sometimes: just now I feel as if I could almost grow to your heart."

"I will return directly, dear," remarked Mrs Pryor, as she laid Caroline down.

Quitting her, she glided to the door, softly turned the key in the lock, ascertained that it was fast, and came back. She bent over her. She threw back the curtain to admit the moonlight more freely. She gazed intently on her face.

"Then, if you love me," said she, speaking quickly, with an altered voice: "if you feel as if—to use your own words—you could 'grow to my heart,' it will be neither shock nor pain for you to know that *that* heart is the source whence yours was filled: that from *my* veins issued the tide which flows in *yours*; that you are *mine*—my daughter—my own child."

"Mrs Pryor"——

"My own child!"

"That is—that means—you have adopted me?"

"It means that, if I have given you nothing else, I at least gave you life; that I bore you—nursed you; that I am your true mother; no other woman can claim the title—it is *mine*."

"But Mrs James Helstone—but my father's wife, whom I do not remember ever to have seen, she is my mother?"

"She *is* your mother: James Helstone was *my* husband. I say you are *mine*. I have proved it. I thought perhaps you were all his, which would have

been a cruel dispensation for me; I find it is *not* so. God permitted me to be the parent of my child's mind; it belongs to me: it is my property—my *right*. These features are James's own. He had a fine face when he was young, and not altered by error. Papa, my darling, gave you your blue eyes and soft brown hair: he gave you the oval of your face and the regularity of your lineaments; the outside *he* conferred; but the heart and the brain are *mine:* the germs are from *me*, and they are improved, they are developed to excellence. I esteem and approve my child as highly as I do most fondly love her."

"Is what I hear true? Is it no dream?"

"I wish it were as true that the substance and colour of health were restored to your cheek."

"My own mother! is she one I can be so fond of as I can of you? People generally did not like her, so I have been given to understand."

"They told you that? Well, your mother now tells you, that, not having the gift to please people generally, for their approbation she does not care: her thoughts are centred in her child: does that child welcome or reject her?"

"But if you *are* my mother, the world is all changed to me. Surely I can live—I should like to recover"——

"You *must* recover. You drew life and strength from my breast when you were a tiny, fair infant, over whose blue eyes I used to weep, fearing I beheld in your very beauty the sign of qualities that had entered my heart like iron, and pierced through my soul like a sword. Daughter! we have been long parted: I return now to cherish you again."

She held her to her bosom: she cradled her in her arms: she rocked her softly, as if lulling a young child to sleep.

"My mother! My own mother!"

The offspring nestled to the parent; that parent, feeling the endearment and hearing the appeal, gathered her closer still. She covered her with noiseless kisses: she murmured love over her, like a cushat fostering its young.

There was silence in the room for a long while.

. . . . . .

"Does my uncle know?"

"Your uncle knows: I told him when I first came to stay with you here."

"Did you recognise me when we first met at Fieldhead?"

"How could it be otherwise? Mr and Miss Helstone being announced, I was prepared to see my child."

"It was that then which moved you: I saw you disturbed."

"You saw nothing, Caroline, I can cover my feelings. You can never tell what an age of strange sensation I lived, during the two minutes that elapsed between the report of your name and your entrance. You can never tell how your look, mien, carriage, shook me."

"Why? Were you disappointed?"

"What will she be like? I had asked myself; and when I saw what you were like, I could have dropped."

"Mamma, why?"

"I trembled in your presence. I said I will never own her; she shall never know me."

"But I said and did nothing remarkable. I felt a little diffident at the thought of an introduction to strangers, that was all."

"I soon saw you were diffident; that was the first

thing which reassured me: had you been rustic, clownish, awkward, I should have been content."

"You puzzle me."

"I had reason to dread a fair outside, to mistrust a popular bearing, to shudder before distinction, grace, and courtesy. Beauty and affability had come in my way when I was recluse, desolate, young, and ignorant: a toil-worn governess perishing of uncheered labour, breaking down before her time. These, Caroline, when they smiled on me, I mistook for angels! I followed them home, and when into their hands I had given without reserve my whole chance of future happiness, it was my lot to witness a transfiguration on the domestic hearth: to see the white mask lifted, the bright disguise put away, and opposite me sat down—O God! I *have* suffered!"

She sank on the pillow.

"I *have* suffered! None saw—none knew: there was no sympathy—no redemption—no redress!"

"Take comfort, mother: it is over now."

"It is over, and not fruitlessly. I tried to keep the word of His patience: He kept me in the days of my anguish. I was afraid with terror—I was troubled: through great tribulation He brought me through to a salvation revealed in this last time. My fear had torment—He has cast it out: He has given me in its stead perfect love. . . . But, Caroline"——

Thus she invoked her daughter after a pause.

"Mother!"

"I charge you, when you next look on your father's monument, to respect the name chiselled there. To you he did only good. On you he conferred his whole treasure of beauties; nor added to them one dark defect. All *you* derived from him is excellent. You owe him gratitude. Leave, between him and me, the settlement of our mutual account: meddle not: God is the arbiter.

This world's laws never came near us—never! They were powerless as a rotten bulrush to protect me!—impotent as idiot babblings to restrain him! As you said, it is all over now: the grave lies between us. There he sleeps—in that church! To his dust I say this night, what I have never said before, 'James, slumber peacefully! See! your terrible debt is cancelled! Look! I wipe out the long, black account with my own hand!' James, your child atones: this living likeness of you—this thing with your perfect features—this one good gift you gave me has nestled affectionately to my heart, and tenderly called me 'mother.' Husband! rest forgiven!"

"Dearest mother, that is right! Can papa's spirit hear us? Is he comforted to know that we still love him?"

"I said nothing of love: I spoke of forgiveness. Mind the truth, child—I said nothing of love! On the threshold of eternity, should he be there to see me enter, will I maintain that."

"Oh, mother? you must have suffered!"

"Oh, child! the human heart *can* suffer. It can hold more tears than the ocean holds waters. We never know how deep—how wide it is, till misery begins to unbind her clouds, and fill it with rushing blackness."

"Mother, forget."

"Forget!" she said, with the strangest spectre of a laugh. "The north pole will rush to the south, and the headlands of Europe be locked into the bays of Australia ere I forget."

"Hush, mother! rest!—be at peace!"

And the child lulled the parent, as the parent had erst lulled the child. At last Mrs Pryor wept: she then grew calmer. She resumed those tender cares agitation had for a moment suspended. Replacing her

daughter on the couch, she smoothed the pillow, and spread the sheet. The soft hair whose locks were loosened, she rearranged, the damp brow she refreshed with a cool, fragrant essence.

"Mamma, let them bring a candle, that I may see you; and tell my uncle to come into this room by-and-by: I want to hear him say that I am your daughter: and, mamma, take your supper here; don't leave me for one minute to-night."

"Oh, Caroline! it is well you are gentle. You will say to me go, and I shall go; come, and I shall come; do this, and I shall do it. You inherit a certain manner as well as certain features. It will be always 'mamma' prefacing a mandate: softly spoken though from you, thank God! Well" (she added, under her breath), "he spoke softly too, once,—like a flute breathing tenderness; and then, when the world was not by to listen, discords that split the nerves and curdled the blood—sounds to inspire insanity."

"It seems so natural, mamma, to ask you for this and that. I shall want nobody but you to be near me, or to do anything for me; but do not let me be troublesome: check me, if I encroach."

"You must not depend on me to check you: you must keep guard over yourself. I have little moral courage: the want of it is my bane. It is that which has made me an unnatural parent—which has kept me apart from my child during the ten years which have elapsed since my husband's death left me at liberty to claim her: it was that which first unnerved my arms and permitted the infant I might have retained a while longer, to be snatched prematurely from their embrace."

"How, mamma?"

"I let you go as a babe, because you were pretty, and I feared your loveliness; deeming it the stamp of perversity. They sent me your portrait, taken at eight

years old; that portrait confirmed my fears. Had it shown me a sunburnt little rustic—a heavy, blunt-featured, commonplace child—I should have hastened to claim you; but there, under the silver paper, I saw blooming the delicacy of an aristocratic flower—'little lady' was written on every trait. I had too recently crawled from under the yoke of the fine gentleman—escaped, galled, crushed, paralysed, dying—to dare to encounter his still finer and most fairy-like representative. My sweet little lady overwhelmed me with dismay: her air of native elegance froze my very marrow. In my experience I had not met with truth, modesty, good principle as the concomitants of beauty. A form so straight and fine, I argued, must conceal a mind warped and cruel. I had little faith in the power of education to rectify such a mind; or rather, I entirely misdoubted my own ability to influence it. Caroline, I dared not undertake to rear you: I resolved to leave you in your uncle's hands. Matthewson Helstone I knew, if an austere, was an upright man. He and all the world thought hardly of me for my strange, unmotherly resolve, and I deserved to be misjudged."

"Mamma, why did you call yourself Mrs Pryor?"

"It was a name in my mother's family. I adopted it that I might live unmolested. My married name recalled too vividly my married life: I could not bear it. Besides, threats were uttered of forcing me to return to bondage: it could not be; rather a bier for a bed—the grave for a home. My new name sheltered me: I resumed under its screen my old occupation of teaching. At first, it scarcely procured me the means of sustaining life; but how savoury was hunger when I fasted in peace! How safe seemed the darkness and chill of an unkindled hearth, when no lurid reflection from terror crimsoned its desolation! How serene

was solitude, when I feared not the irruption of violence and vice."

"But, mamma, you have been in this neighbourhood before. How did it happen, that when you re-appeared here with Miss Keeldar, you were not recognised?"

"I only paid a short visit, as a bride, twenty years ago; and then I was very different to what I am now—slender, almost as slender as my daughter is at this day: my complexion—my very features are changed; my hair, my style of dress—everything is altered. You cannot fancy me a slim young person, attired in scanty drapery of white muslin, with bare arms, bracelets and necklace of beads, and hair disposed in round Grecian curls above my forehead?"

"You must, indeed, have been different. Mamma, I heard the front door open: if it is my uncle coming in, just ask him to step upstairs, and let me hear his assurance that I am truly awake and collected, and not dreaming or delirious."

The Rector, of his own accord, was mounting the stairs; and Mrs Pryor summoned him to his niece's apartment.

"She's not worse, I hope?" he inquired hastily.

"I think her better; she is disposed to converse—she seems stronger."

"Good!" said he, brushing quickly into the room. "Ha, Cary! how do? Did you drink my cup of tea? I made it for you just as I like it myself."

"I drank it every drop, uncle: it did me good—it has made me quite alive. I have a wish for company, so I begged Mrs Pryor to call you in."

The respected ecclesiastic looked pleased, and yet embarrassed. He was willing enough to bestow his company on his sick niece for ten minutes, since it was her whim to wish it; but what means to employ for

her entertainment, he knew not: he hemmed—he fidgeted.

"You'll be up in a trice," he observed, by way of saying something. "The little weakness will soon pass off; and then you must drink port-wine—a pipe, if you can—and eat game and oysters: I'll get them for you, if they are to be had anywhere. Bless me! we'll make you as strong as Samson before we've done with you."

"Who is that lady, uncle, standing beside you at the bed-foot?"

"Good God!" he ejaculated. "She's not wandering—is she, ma'am?"

Mrs Pryor smiled.

"I am wandering in a pleasant world," said Caroline, in a soft, happy voice, "and I want you to tell me whether it is real or visionary. What lady is that? Give her a name, uncle?"

"We must have Dr Rile again, ma'am, or better still, MacTurk: he's less of a humbug. Thomas must saddle the pony, and go for him."

"No: I don't want a doctor; mamma shall be my only physician. Now, do you understand, uncle?"

Mr Helstone pushed up his spectacles from his nose to his forehead, handled his snuff-box, and administered to himself a portion of the contents. Thus fortified, he answered briefly—"I see delight. You've told her then, ma'am?"

"And is it *true?*" demanded Caroline, rising on her pillow. "Is she *really* my mother?"

"You won't cry, or make any scene, or turn hysterical, if I answer Yes?"

"Cry? I'd cry if you said *No*. It would be terrible to be disappointed now. But give her a name: how do you call her?"

"I call this stout lady in a quaint black dress, who

looks young enough to wear much smarter raiment, if she would—I call her Agnes Helstone: she married my brother James, and is his widow."

"And my mother?"

"What a little sceptic it is! Look at her small face, Mrs Pryor, scarcely larger than the palm of my hand, alive with acuteness and eagerness." (To Caroline.) "She had the trouble of bringing you into the world at any rate: mind you show your duty to her by quickly getting well, and repairing the waste of these cheeks. Heigho! she used to be plump: what she has done with it all, I can't, for the life of me, divine."

"If *wishing* to get well will help me, I shall not be long sick. This morning, I had no reason and no strength to wish it."

Fanny here tapped at the door, and said that supper was ready.

"Uncle, if you please, you may send me a little of supper—anything you like, from your own plate. That is wiser than going into hysterics,—is it not?"

"It is spoken like a sage, Cary: see if I don't cater for you judiciously. When women are sensible—and, above all, intelligible—I can get on with them. It is only the vague, superfine sensations, and extremely wire-drawn notions, that put me about. Let a woman ask me to give her an edible or a wearable—be the same a roc's egg or the breastplate of Aaron, a share of St John's locusts and honey or the leathern girdle about his loins—I can, at least, understand the demand: but when they pine for they know not what—sympathy—sentiment—some of these indefinite abstractions—I can't do it: I don't know it; I haven't got it. Madam, accept my arm."

Mrs Pryor signified that she should stay with her daughter that evening. Helstone, accordingly, left them

together. He soon returned, bringing a plate in his own consecrated hand.

"This is chicken," he said; "but we'll have partridge to-morrow. Lift her up, and put a shawl over her. On my word, I understand nursing. Now, here is the very same little silver fork you used when you first came to the Rectory: that strikes me as being what you may call a happy thought—a delicate attention. Take it, Cary, and munch away cleverly."

Caroline did her best. Her uncle frowned to see that her powers were so limited: he prophesied, however, great things for the future; and as she praised the morsel he had brought, and smiled gratefully in his face, he stooped over her pillow, kissed her, and said, with a broken, rugged accent—"Good night, bairnie! God bless thee!"

Caroline enjoyed such peaceful rest that night, circled by her mother's arms, and pillowed on her breast, that she forgot to wish for any other stay; and though more than one feverish dream came to her in slumber, yet, when she woke up panting, so happy and contented a feeling returned with returning consciousness, that her agitation was soothed almost as soon as felt.

As to the mother, she spent the night like Jacob at Peniel. Till break of day, she wrestled with God in earnest prayer.

Chapter xxv.

THE WEST WIND BLOWS.

NOT always do those who dare such divine conflict prevail. Night after night the sweat of agony may burst dark on the forehead; the supplicant may cry for mercy with that soundless voice the soul

utters when its appeal is to the Invisible. "Spare my beloved," it may implore. "Heal my life's life. Rend not from me what long affection entwines with my whole nature. God of heaven—bend—hear—be clement!" And after this cry and strife, the sun may rise and see him worsted. That opening morn, which used to salute him with the whisper of zephyrs, the carol of skylarks, may breathe, as its first accents, from the dear lips which colour and heat have quitted—"Oh! I have had a suffering night. This morning I am worse. I have tried to rise. I cannot. Dreams I am unused to have troubled me."

Then the watcher approaches the patient's pillow, and sees a new and strange moulding of the familiar features, feels at once than the insufferable moment draws nigh, knows that it is God's will his idol shall be broken, and bends his head, and subdues his soul to the sentence he cannot avert, and scarce can bear.

Happy Mrs Pryor! She was still praying, unconscious that the summer sun hung above the hills, when her child softly woke in her arms. No piteous, unconscious moaning—sound which so wastes our strength that, even if we have sworn to be firm, a rush of unconquerable tears sweeps away the oath—preceded her waking. No space of deaf apathy followed. The first words spoken were not those of one becoming estranged from this world, and already permitted to stray at times into realms foreign to the living. Caroline evidently remembered with clearness what had happened.

"Mamma, I have slept *so* well. I only dreamed and woke twice."

Mrs Pryor rose with a start, that her daughter might not see the joyful tears called into her eyes by that affectionate word "mamma," and the welcome assurance that followed it.

For many days the mother dared rejoice only with trembling. That first revival seemed like the flicker of a dying lamp: if the flame streamed up bright one moment, the next it sank dim in the socket. Exhaustion followed close on excitement.

There was always a touching endeavour to *appear* better, but too often ability refused to second will; too often the attempt to bear up failed: the effort to eat, to talk, to look cheerful, was unsuccessful. Many an hour passed, during which Mrs Pryor feared that the chords of life could never more be strengthened, though the time of their breaking might be deferred.

During this space the mother and daughter seemed left almost alone in the neighbourhood. It was the close of August: the weather was fine—that is to say, it was very dry and very dusty, for an arid wind had been blowing from the east this month past: very cloudless, too, though a pale haze, stationary in the atmosphere, seemed to rob of all depth of tone the blue of heaven, of all freshness the verdure of earth, and of all glow the light of day. Almost every family in Briarfield was absent on an excursion. Miss Keeldar and her friends were at the seaside; so were Mrs Yorke's household. Mr Hall and Louis Moore, between whom a spontaneous intimacy seemed to have arisen, the result, probably, of harmony of views and temperament, were gone "up north" on a pedestrian excursion to the Lakes. Even Hortense, who would fain have stayed at home and aided Mrs Pryor in nursing Caroline, had been so earnestly entreated by Miss Mann to accompany her once more to Wormwood Wells, in the hope of alleviating sufferings greatly aggravated by the insalubrious weather, that she felt obliged to comply; indeed, it was not in her nature to refuse a request that at once appealed to her goodness of heart,—and—by a confession of dependency—flattered her *amour-propre*. As for Robert, from

Birmingham he had gone on to London, where he still sojourned.

So long as the breath of Asiatic deserts parched Caroline's lips and fevered her veins, her physical convalescence could not keep pace with her returning mental tranquillity: but there came a day when the wind ceased to sob at the eastern gable of the Rectory, and at the oriel window of the church. A little cloud like a man's hand arose in the west: gusts from the same quarter drove it on and spread it wide; wet and tempest prevailed a while. When that was over the sun broke out genially, heaven regained its azure, and earth its green; the livid cholera-tint had vanished from the face of nature: the hills rose clear round the horizon, absolved from that pale malaria-haze.

Caroline's youth could now be of some avail to her, and so could her mother's nurture: both—crowned by God's blessing, sent in the pure west wind blowing soft as fresh through the ever-open chamber lattice—rekindled her long-languishing energies. At last Mrs Pryor saw that it was permitted to hope—a genuine, material convalescence had commenced. It was not merely Caroline's smile which was brighter, or her spirits which were cheered, but a certain look had passed from her face and eye—a look dread and indescribable, but which will easily be recalled by those who have watched the couch of dangerous disease. Long before the emaciated outlines of her aspect began to fill, or its departed colour to return, a more subtle change took place: all grew softer and warmer. Instead of a marble mask and glassy eye, Mrs Pryor saw laid on the pillow a face pale and wasted enough, perhaps more haggard than the other appearance, but less awful; for it was a sick, living girl—not a mere white mould, or rigid piece of statuary.

Now, too, she was not always petitioning to drink.

The words "I am *so* thirsty," ceased to be her plaint. Sometimes, when she had swallowed a morsel, she would say it had revived her: all descriptions of food were no longer equally distasteful; she could be induced, sometimes, to indicate a preference. With what trembling pleasure and anxious care did not her nurse prepare what was selected! How she watched her as she partook of it!

Nourishment brought strength. She could sit up. Then she longed to breathe the fresh air, to revisit her flowers, to see how the fruit had ripened. Her uncle, always liberal, had bought a garden-chair for her express use: he carried her down in his own arms, and placed her in it himself, and William Farren was there to wheel her round the walks, to show her what he had done amongst her plants, to take her directions for further work.

William and she found plenty to talk about: they had a dozen topics in common; interesting to them, unimportant to the rest of the world. They took a similar interest in animals, birds, insects, and plants: they held similar doctrines about humanity to the lower creation; and had a similar turn for minute observation on points of natural history. The nest and proceedings of some ground-bees, which had burrowed in the turf under an old cherry-tree, was one subject of interest: the haunts of certain hedge-sparrows, and the welfare of certain pearly eggs and callow fledgelings, another.

Had "Chambers's Journal" existed in those days, it would certainly have formed Miss Helstone's and Farren's favourite periodical. She would have subscribed for it; and to him each number would duly have been lent: both would have put implicit faith, and found great savour in its marvellous anecdotes of animal sagacity.

This is a digression; but it suffices to explain why

Caroline would have no other hand than William's to guide her chair, and why his society and conversation sufficed to give interest to her garden-airings.

Mrs Pryor, walking near, wondered how her daughter could be so much at ease with a "man of the people." *She* found it impossible to speak to him otherwise than stiffly. She felt as if a great gulf lay between her caste and his; and that to cross it, or meet him half-way, would be to degrade herself. She gently asked Caroline—"Are you not afraid, my dear, to converse with that person so unreservedly? He may presume, and become troublesomely garrulous."

"William presume, mamma? You don't know him. He never presumes: he is altogether too proud and sensitive to do so. William has very fine feelings."

And Mrs Pryor smiled sceptically at the naïve notion of that rough-handed, rough-headed, fustian-clad clown having "fine feelings."

Farren, for his part, showed Mrs Pryor only a very sulky brow. He knew when he was misjudged, and was apt to turn unmanageable with such as failed to give him his due.

The evening restored Caroline entirely to her mother, and Mrs Pryor liked the evening; for then, alone with her daughter, no human shadow came between her and what she loved. During the day, she would have her stiff demeanour and cool moments, as was her wont. Between her and Mr Helstone a very respectful but most rigidly ceremonious intercourse was kept up: anything like familiarity would have bred contempt at once in one or both these personages: but by dint of strict civility and well-maintained distance, they got on very smoothly.

Towards the servants, Mrs Pryor's bearing was not uncourteous, but shy, freezing, ungenial. Perhaps it was diffidence rather than pride which made her appear

so haughty; but, as was to be expected, Fanny and Eliza failed to make the distinction, and she was unpopular with them accordingly. She felt the effect produced: it rendered her at times dissatisfied with herself for faults she could not help; and with all else, dejected, chill, and taciturn.

This mood changed to Caroline's influence, and to that influence alone. The dependent fondness of her nursling, the natural affection of her child, came over her suavely: her frost fell away; her rigidity unbent: she grew smiling and pliant. Not that Caroline made any wordy profession of love—that would ill have suited Mrs Pryor: she would have read therein the proof of insincerity; but she hung on her with easy dependence; she confided in her with fearless reliance: these things contented the mother's heart.

She liked to hear her daughter say "Mamma, do this." "Please, mamma, fetch me that." "Mamma, read to me." "Sing a little, mamma."

Nobody else—not one living thing—had ever so claimed her services, so looked for help at her hand. Other people were always more or less reserved and stiff with her, as she was reserved and stiff with them; other people betrayed consciousness of, and annoyance at her weak points: Caroline no more showed such wounding sagacity or reproachful sensitiveness now, than she had done when a suckling of three months old.

Yet Caroline could find fault. Blind to the constitutional defects that were incurable, she had her eyes wide open to the acquired habits that were susceptible of remedy. On certain points she would quite artlessly lecture her parent; and that parent, instead of being hurt, felt a sensation of pleasure in discovering that the girl *dared* lecture her; that she was so much at home with her.

"Mamma, I am determined you shall not wear that

old gown any more; its fashion is not becoming: it is too strait in the skirt. You shall put on your black silk every afternoon; in that you look nice: it suits you; and you shall have a black satin dress for Sundays—a real satin—not a satinet or any of the shams. And, mamma, when you get the new one, mind you must wear it."

"My dear, I thought of the black silk serving me as a best dress for many years yet, and I wished to buy you several things."

"Nonsense, mamma: my uncle gives me cash to get what I want: you know he is generous enough; and I have set my heart on seeing you in a black satin. Get it soon, and let it be made by a dressmaker of my recommending: let me choose the pattern. You always want to disguise yourself like a grandmother: you would persuade one that you are old and ugly,—not at all! On the contrary, when well dressed and cheerful, you are very comely indeed. Your smile is so pleasant, your teeth are so white, your hair is still such a pretty light colour. And then you speak like a young lady, with such a clear, fine tone, and you sing better than any young lady I ever heard. Why do you wear such dresses and bonnets, mamma, such as nobody else ever wears?"

"Does it annoy you, Caroline?"

"Very much: it vexes me even. People say you are miserly; and yet you are not, for you give liberally to the poor and to religious societies: though your gifts are conveyed so secretly and quietly, that they are known to few except the receivers. But I will be your maid myself: when I get a little stronger I will set to work, and you must be good, mamma, and do as I bid you."

And Caroline, sitting near her mother, re-arranged her muslin handkerchief, and re-smoothed her hair.

"My own mamma," then she went on, as if pleasing herself with the thought of their relationship, "who belongs to me, and to whom I belong! I am a rich girl now: I have something I can love well, and not be afraid of loving. Mamma, who gave you this little brooch? Let me unpin it and look at it."

Mrs Pryor, who usually shrank from meddling fingers and near approach, allowed the license complacently.

"Did papa give you this, mamma?"

"My sister gave it me—my only sister, Cary. Would that your aunt Caroline had lived to see her niece!"

"Have you nothing of papa's?—no trinket, no gift of his?"

"I have one thing."

"That you prize?"

"That I prize."

"Valuable and pretty?"

"Invaluable and sweet to me."

"Show it, mamma. Is it here or at Fieldhead?"

"It is talking to me now, leaning on me: its arms are round me."

"Ah! mamma! you mean your teasing daughter, who will never let you alone; who, when you go into your room, cannot help running to seek for you; who follows you upstairs and down, like a dog."

"Whose features still give me such a strange thrill sometimes. I half fear your fair looks yet, child."

"You don't; you can't. Mamma, I'm sorry papa was not good: I do so wish he had been. Wickedness spoils and poisons all pleasant things: it kills love. If you and I thought each other wicked, we could not love each other, could we?"

"And if we could not trust each other, Cary?"

"How miserable we should be! Mother, before I knew you, I had an apprehension that you were not

good, that I could not esteem you: that dread damped my wish to see you; and now my heart is elate because I find you perfect,—almost; kind, clever, nice. Your sole fault is that you are old-fashioned, and of that I shall cure you. Mamma, put your work down: read to me. I like your southern accent: it is so pure, so soft. It has no rugged burr, no nasal twang, such as almost every one's voice here in the north has. My uncle and Mr Hall say that you are a fine reader, mamma. Mr Hall said he never heard any lady read with such propriety of expression, or purity of accent."

"I wish I could reciprocate the compliment, Cary; but really, the first time I heard your truly excellent friend read and preach, I could not understand his broad, northern tongue."

"Could you understand me, mamma? Did I seem to speak roughly?"

"No: I almost wished you had, as I wished you had looked unpolished. Your father, Caroline, naturally spoke well; quite otherwise than your worthy uncle: correctly, gently, smoothly. You inherit the gift."

"Poor papa! When he was so agreeable, why was he not good?"

"Why he was *as* he was—and, happily, of that you, child, can form no conception—I cannot tell: it is a deep mystery. The key is in the hands of his Maker: there I leave it."

"Mamma, you will keep stitching, stitching away: put down the sewing; I am an enemy to it. It cumbers your lap, and I want it for my head: it engages your eyes, and I want them for a book. Here is your favourite—Cowper."

These importunities were the mother's pleasure. If ever she delayed compliance, it was only to hear them repeated, and to enjoy her child's soft, half-playful,

half-petulant urgency. And then, when she yielded, Caroline would say archly—"You will spoil me, mamma. I always thought I should like to be spoiled, and I find it very sweet."

So did Mrs Pryor.

Chapter xxvj.

OLD COPY-BOOKS.

BY the time the Fieldhead party returned to Briarfield, Caroline was nearly well. Miss Keeldar, who had received news by post of her friend's convalescence, hardly suffered an hour to elapse between her arrival at home and her first call at the Rectory.

A shower of rain was falling gently, yet fast, on the late flowers and russet autumn shrubs, when the garden-wicket was heard to swing open, and Shirley's well-known form passed the window. On her entrance, her feelings were evinced in her own peculiar fashion. When deeply moved, by serious fears or joys, she was not garrulous. The strong emotion was rarely suffered to influence her tongue; and even her eye refused it more than a furtive and fitful conquest. She took Caroline in her arms, gave her one look, one kiss, then said—"You are better."

And a minute after—"I see you are safe now, but take care. God grant your health may be called on to sustain no more shocks!"

She proceeded to talk fluently about the journey. In the midst of vivacious discourse, her eye still wandered to Caroline: there spoke in its light a deep solicitude, some trouble, and some amaze.

"She may be better," it said: "but how weak she still is! What peril she has come through!"

Suddenly her glance reverted to Mrs Pryor: it pierced her through.

"When will my governess return to me?" she asked.

"May I tell her all?" demanded Caroline of her mother. Leave being signified by a gesture, Shirley was presently enlightened on what had happened in her absence.

"Very good!" was the cool comment. "Very good! But it is no news to me."

"What! Did you know?"

"I guessed long since the whole business. I have heard somewhat of Mrs Pryor's history—not from herself, but from others. With every detail of Mr James Helstone's career and character I was acquainted: an afternoon's sitting and conversation with Miss Mann had rendered me familiar therewith; also he is one of Mrs Yorke's warning-examples—one of the blood-red lights she hangs out to scare young ladies from matrimony. I believe I should have been sceptical about the truth of the portrait traced by such fingers—both these ladies take a dark pleasure in offering to view the dark side of life—but I questioned Mr Yorke on the subject, and he said—'Shirley, my woman, if you want to know aught about yond' James Helstone, I can only say he was a man-tiger. He was handsome, dissolute, soft, treacherous, courteous, cruel'—— Don't cry, Cary; we'll say no more about it."

"I am not crying, Shirley; or if I am, it is nothing—go on: you are no friend if you withhold from me the truth: I hate that false plan of disguising, mutilating the truth."

"Fortunately, I have said pretty nearly all that I have to say, except that your uncle himself confirmed Mr Yorke's words: for he too scorns a lie, and deals in none of those conventional subterfuges that are shabbier than lies."

"But papa is dead: they should let him alone now."

"They should—and we *will* let him alone. Cry away, Cary, it will do you good: it is wrong to check natural tears; besides, I choose to please myself by sharing an idea that at this moment beams in your mother's eye while she looks at you: every drop blots out a sin. Weep—your tears have the virtue which the rivers of Damascus lacked: like Jordan, they can cleanse a leprous memory."

"Madam," she continued, addressing Mrs Pryor, "did you think I could be daily in the habit of seeing you and your daughter together—marking your marvellous similarity in many points—observing, pardon me—your irrepressible emotions in the presence and still more in the absence of your child, and not form my own conjectures? I formed them, and they are literally correct. I shall begin to think myself shrewd."

"And you said nothing?" observed Caroline, who soon regained the quiet control of her feelings.

"Nothing. I had no warrant to breathe a word on the subject. *My* business it was not: I abstained from making it such."

"You guessed so deep a secret, and did not hint that you guessed it?"

"Is that so difficult?"

"It is not like you."

"How do you know?"

"You are not reserved. You are frankly communicative."

"I may be communicative, yet know where to stop. In showing my treasure, I may withhold a gem or two—a curious unbought, graven stone—an amulet, of whose mystic glitter I rarely permit even myself a glimpse. Good-day."

Caroline thus seemed to get a view of Shirley's

character under a novel aspect. Erelong, the prospect was renewed: it opened upon her.

No sooner had she regained sufficient strength to bear a change of scene—the excitement of a little society—than Miss Keeldar sued daily for her presence at Fieldhead. Whether Shirley had become wearied of her honoured relatives is not known; she did not say she was; but she claimed and retained Caroline with an eagerness which proved that an addition to that worshipful company was not unwelcome.

The Sympsons were Church people: of course, the Rector's niece was received by them with courtesy. Mr Sympson proved to be a man of spotless respectability, worrying temper, pious principles, and worldly views; his lady was a very good woman, patient, kind, well-bred. She had been brought up on a narrow system of views—starved on a few prejudices: a mere handful of bitter herbs; a few preferences, soaked till their natural flavour was extracted, and with no seasoning added in the cooking; some excellent principles, made up in a stiff raised-crust of bigotry, difficult to digest: far too submissive was she to complain of this diet, or to ask for a crumb beyond it.

The daughters were an example to their sex. They were tall, with a Roman nose apiece. They had been educated faultlessly. All they did was well done. History, and the most solid books, had cultivated their minds. Principles and opinions they possessed which could not be mended. More exactly-regulated lives, feelings, manners, habits, it would have been difficult to find anywhere. They knew by heart a certain young-ladies'-schoolroom code of laws on language, demeanour, &c.; themselves never deviated from its curious little pragmatical provisions; and they regarded with secret, whispered horror, all deviations in others. The Abomination of Desolation was no mystery to them:

they had discovered that unutterable Thing in the characteristic others call Originality. Quick were they to recognise the signs of this evil; and wherever they saw its trace—whether in look, word, or deed; whether they read it in the fresh vigorous style of a book, or listened to it in interesting, unhackneyed, pure, expressive language—they shuddered—they recoiled: danger was above their heads—peril about their steps. What was this strange thing? Being unintelligible, it must be bad. Let it be denounced and chained up.

Henry Sympson—the only son, and youngest child of the family—was a boy of fifteen. He generally kept with his tutor; when he left him, he sought his cousin Shirley. This boy differed from his sisters; he was little, lame, and pale; his large eyes shone somewhat languidly in a wan orbit: they were, indeed, usually rather dim—but they were capable of illumination; at times, they could not only shine, but blaze: inward emotion could likewise give colour to his cheek and decision to his cripple movements. Henry's mother loved him; she thought his peculiarities were a mark of election: he was not like other children, she allowed; she believed him regenerate—a new Samuel—called of God from his birth: he was to be a clergyman. Mr and the Misses Sympson, not understanding the youth, let him much alone. Shirley made him her pet; and he made Shirley his playmate.

In the midst of this family circle—or rather outside it—moved the tutor—the satellite.

Yes: Louis Moore was a satellite of the house of Sympson: connected, yet apart; ever attendant—ever distant. Each member of that correct family treated him with proper dignity. The father was austerely civil, sometimes irritable; the mother, being a kind woman, was attentive, but formal; the daughters saw in him an abstraction, not a man. It seemed, by their

manner, that their brother's tutor did not live for them. They were learned: so was he—but not for them. They were accomplished: he had talents too, imperceptible to their senses. The most spirited sketch from his fingers was a blank to their eyes; the most original observation from his lips fell unheard on their ears. Nothing could exceed the propriety of their behaviour.

I should have said, nothing could have equalled it; but I remember a fact which strangely astonished Caroline Helstone. It was—to discover that her cousin had absolutely *no* sympathising friend at Fieldhead: that to Miss Keeldar he was as much a mere teacher, as little a gentleman, as little a man, as to the estimable Misses Sympson.

What had befallen the kind-hearted Shirley that she should be so indifferent to the dreary position of a fellow-creature thus isolated under her roof? She was not, perhaps, haughty to him, but she never noticed him: she let him alone. He came and went, spoke or was silent, and she rarely recognised his existence.

As to Louis Moore himself, he had the air of a man used to this life, and who had made up his mind to bear it for a time. His faculties seemed walled up in him, and were unmurmuring in their captivity. He never laughed; he seldom smiled; he was uncomplaining. He fulfilled the round of his duties scrupulously. His pupil loved him; he asked nothing more than civility from the rest of the world. It even appeared that he would accept nothing more: in that abode at least; for when his cousin Caroline made gentle overtures of friendship, he did not encourage them; he rather avoided than sought her. One living thing alone, besides his pale, crippled scholar, he fondled in the house, and that was the ruffianly Tartar; who, sullen and impracticable to others, acquired a singular partiality for him: a partiality so marked that sometimes, when

Moore, summoned to a meal, entered the room and sat down unwelcomed, Tartar would rise from his lair at Shirley's feet, and betake himself to the taciturn tutor. Once—but once—she noticed the desertion; and holding out her white hand, and speaking softly, tried to coax him back. Tartar looked, slavered, and sighed, as his manner was, but yet disregarded the invitation, and coolly settled himself on his haunches at Louis Moore's side. That gentleman drew the dog's big, black-muzzled head on to his knee, patted him, and smiled one little smile to himself.

An acute observer might have remarked, in the course of the same evening, that after Tartar had resumed his allegiance to Shirley, and was once more couched near her foot-stool, the audacious tutor by one word and gesture fascinated him again. He pricked up his ears at the word; he started erect at the gesture, and came, with head lovingly depressed, to receive the expected caress: as it was given, the significant smile again rippled across Moore's quiet face.

"Shirley," said Caroline one day, as they two were sitting alone in the summer-house, "did you know that my cousin Louis was tutor in your uncle's family before the Sympsons came down here?"

Shirley's reply was not so prompt as her responses usually were, but at last she answered—"Yes,—of course: I knew it well."

"I thought you must have been aware of the circumstance."

"Well! what then?"

"It puzzles me to guess how it chanced that you never mentioned it to me."

"Why should it puzzle you?"

"It seems odd. I cannot account for it. You talk a great deal,—you talk freely. How was that circumstance never touched on?"

"Because it never was," and Shirley laughed.

"You are a singular being!" observed her friend: "I thought I knew you quite well: I begin to find myself mistaken. You were silent as the grave about Mrs Pryor; and now, again, here is another secret. But why you made it a secret is the mystery to me."

"I never made it a secret: I had no reason for so doing. If you had asked me who Henry's tutor was, I would have told you: besides, I thought you knew."

"I am puzzled about more things than one in this matter: you don't like poor Louis,—why? Are you impatient at what you perhaps consider his *servile* position? Do you wish that Robert's brother were more highly placed?"

"Robert's brother, indeed!" was the exclamation, uttered in a tone like the accents of scorn; and, with a movement of proud impatience, Shirley snatched a rose from a branch peeping through the open lattice.

"Yes," repeated Caroline, with mild firmness; "Robert's brother. He *is* thus closely related to Gérard Moore of the Hollow, though nature has not given him features so handsome, or an air so noble as his kinsman; but his blood is as good, and he is as much a gentleman, were he free."

"Wise, humble, pious Caroline!" exclaimed Shirley ironically. "Men and angels, hear her! We should not despise plain features, nor a laborious yet honest occupation, should we? Look at the subject of your panegyric,—he is there in the garden," she continued, pointing through an aperture in the clustering creepers; and by that aperture Louis Moore was visible, coming slowly down the walk.

"He is not ugly, Shirley," pleaded Caroline; "he is not ignoble; he is sad: silence seals his mind; but I believe him to be intelligent, and be certain, if he had

not something very commendable in his disposition, Mr Hall would never seek his society as he does."

Shirley laughed: she laughed again; each time with a slightly sarcastic sound. "Well, well," was her comment. "On the plea of the man being Cyril Hall's friend and Robert Moore's brother, we'll just tolerate his existence—won't we, Cary? You believe him to be intelligent, do you? Not quite an idiot—eh? Something commendable in his disposition! *id est*, not an absolute ruffian. Good! Your representations have weight with me; and to prove that they have, should he come this way I will speak to him."

He approached the summer-house: unconscious that it was tenanted, he sat down on the step. Tartar, now his customary companion, had followed him, and he crouched across his feet.

"Old boy!" said Louis, pulling his tawny ear, or rather the mutilated remains of that organ, torn and chewed in a hundred battles, "the autumn sun shines as pleasantly on us as on the fairest and richest. This garden is none of ours, but we enjoy its greenness and perfume, don't we?"

He sat silent, still caressing Tartar, who slobbered with exceeding affection. A faint twittering commenced among the trees round: something fluttered down as light as leaves: they were little birds, which, lighting on the sward at shy distance, hopped as if expectant.

"The small brown elves actually remember that I fed them the other day," again soliloquised Louis. They want some more biscuit: to-day, I forgot to save a fragment. Eager little sprites, I have not a crumb for you."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew it out empty.

"A want easily supplied," whispered the listening Miss Keeldar.

She took from her reticule a morsel of sweet-cake:

for that repository was never destitute of something available to throw to the chickens, young ducks, or sparrows; she crumbled it, and bending over his shoulder, put the crumbs into his hand.

"There," said she; "there is a Providence for the improvident."

"This September afternoon is pleasant," observed Louis Moore, as—not at all discomposed—he calmly cast the crumbs on to the grass.

"Even for you?"

"As pleasant for me as for any monarch."

"You take a sort of harsh, solitary triumph in drawing pleasure out of the elements, and the inanimate and lower animate creation."

"Solitary, but not harsh. With animals I feel I am Adam's son: the heir of him to whom dominion was given over 'every living thing that moveth upon the earth.' Your dog likes and follows me; when I go into that yard, the pigeons from your dove-cot flutter at my feet; your mare in the stable knows me as well as it knows you, and obeys me better."

"And my roses smell sweet to you, and my trees give you shade."

"And," continued Louis, "no caprice can withdraw these pleasures from me: they are *mine*."

He walked off: Tartar followed him, as if in duty and affection bound, and Shirley remained standing on the summer-house step. Caroline saw her face as she looked after the rude tutor: it was pale, as if her pride bled inwardly.

"You see," remarked Caroline apologetically, "his feelings are so often hurt, it makes him morose."

"You see," returned Shirley, with ire, "he is a topic on which you and I shall quarrel if we discuss it often; so drop it henceforward and for ever."

"I suppose he has more than once behaved in this

way," thought Caroline to herself; "and that renders Shirley so distant to him: yet I wonder she cannot make allowance for character and circumstances: I wonder the general modesty, manliness, sincerity of his nature, do not plead with her in his behalf. She is not often so inconsiderate—so irritable."

The verbal testimony of two friends of Caroline's to her cousin's character augmented her favourable opinion of him. William Farren, whose cottage he had visited in company with Mr Hall, pronounced him a "real gentleman:" there was not such another in Briarfield: he—William—"could do aught for that man. And then to see how t' bairns liked him, and how t' wife took to him first minute she saw him: he never went into a house but t' childer wor about him directly: them little things wor like as if they'd a keener sense nor grown-up folks i' finding out folk's natures."

Mr Hall, in answer to a question of Miss Helstone's, as to what he thought of Louis Moore, replied promptly that he was the best fellow he had met with since he left Cambridge.

"But he is so grave," objected Caroline.

"Grave! The finest company in the world! Full of odd, quiet, out of the way humour. Never enjoyed an excursion so much in my life as the one I took with him to the Lakes. His understanding and tastes are so superior, it does a man good to be within their influence; and as to his temper and nature, I call them fine."

"At Fieldhead he looks gloomy, and, I believe, has the character of being misanthropical."

"Oh! I fancy he is rather out of place there—in a false position. The Sympsons are most estimable people, but not the folks to comprehend him: they think a great deal about form and ceremony, which are quite out of Louis's way."

"I don't think Miss Keeldar likes him."

"She doesn't know him—she doesn't know him; otherwise, she has sense enough to do justice to his merits."

"Well, I suppose she doesn't know him," mused Caroline to herself, and by this hypothesis she endeavoured to account for what seemed else unaccountable. But such simple solution of the difficulty was not left her long: she was obliged to refuse Miss Keeldar even this negative excuse for her prejudice.

One day she chanced to be in the schoolroom with Henry Sympson, whose amiable and affectionate disposition had quickly recommended him to her regard. The boy was busied about some mechanical contrivance: his lameness made him fond of sedentary occupation: he began to ransack his tutor's desk for a piece of wax, or twine, necessary to his work. Moore happened to be absent. Mr Hall, indeed, had called for him to take a long walk. Henry could not immediately find the object of his search: he rummaged compartment after compartment; and, at last opening an inner drawer, he came upon—not a ball of cord, or a lump of bees' wax—but a little bundle of small marble-coloured cahiers, tied with tape. Henry looked at them—"What rubbish Mr Moore stores up in his desk!" he said: "I hope he won't keep my old exercises so carefully."

"What is it?"

"Old copy-books."

He threw the bundle to Caroline. The packet looked so neat externally, her curiosity was excited to see its contents.

"If they are only copy-books, I suppose I may open them?"

"Oh! yes; quite freely. Mr Moore's desk is half

mine—for he lets me keep all sorts of things in it—and I give you leave."

On scrutiny they proved to be French compositions, written in a hand peculiar but compact, and exquisitely clean and clear. The writing was recognisable: she scarcely needed the further evidence of the name signed at the close of each theme to tell her whose they were. Yet that name astonished her: "Shirley Keeldar, Sympson Grove, ——shire" (a southern county), and a date four years back.

She tied up the packet, and held it in her hand, meditating over it. She half felt as if, in opening it, she had violated a confidence.

"They are Shirley's, you see," said Henry carelessly.

"Did *you* give them to Mr Moore? She wrote them with Mrs Pryor, I suppose?"

"She wrote them in my schoolroom at Sympson Grove, when she lived with us there. Mr Moore taught her French; it is his native language."

"I know. . . . Was she a good pupil, Henry?"

"She was a wild, laughing thing, but pleasant to have in the room: she made lesson-time charming. She learned fast—you could hardly tell when or how. French was nothing to her: she spoke it quick—quick; as quick as Mr Moore himself."

"Was she obedient? Did she give trouble?"

"She gave plenty of trouble in a way: she was giddy, but I liked her. I'm desperately fond of Shirley."

"*Desperately* fond—you small simpleton: you don't know what you say."

"I *am desperately* fond of her; she is the light of my eyes: I said so to Mr Moore last night."

"He would reprove you for speaking with exaggeration."

"He didn't. He never reproves and reproves, as girls' governesses do. He was reading, and he only smiled into his book, and said that if Miss Keeldar was no more than that, she was less than he took her to be; for I was but a dim-eyed, short-sighted little chap. I'm afraid I am a poor unfortunate, Miss Caroline Helstone. I am a cripple, you know."

"Never mind, Henry, you are a very nice little fellow; and if God has not given you health and strength, He has given you a good disposition, and an excellent heart and brain."

"I shall be despised. I sometimes think both Shirley and you despise me."

"Listen, Henry. Generally, I don't like schoolboys: I have a great horror of them. They seem to me little ruffians, who take an unnatural delight in killing and tormenting birds, and insects, and kittens, and whatever is weaker than themselves; but you are so different, I am quite fond of you. You have almost as much sense as a man (far more, God wot," she muttered to herself, "than many men); you are fond of reading, and you can talk sensibly about what you read."

"I *am* fond of reading. I know I have sense, and I know I have feeling."

Miss Keeldar here entered.

"Henry," she said, "I have brought your lunch here: I shall prepare it for you myself."

She placed on the table a glass of new milk, a plate of something which looked not unlike leather, and a utensil which resembled a toasting-fork.

"What are you two about," she continued, "ransacking Mr Moore's desk?"

"Looking at your old copy-books," returned Caroline.

"My old copy-books?"

"French exercise-books. Look here! They must be held precious: they are kept carefully."

She showed the bundle. Shirley snatched it up—"Did not know one was in existence," she said. "I thought the whole lot had long since lit the kitchen-fire, or curled the maid's hair at Sympson Grove. What made you keep them, Henry?"

"It is not my doing: I should not have thought of it: it never entered my head to suppose copy-books of value. Mr Moore put them by in the inner drawer of his desk: perhaps he forgot them."

"C'est cela: he forgot them, no doubt," echoed Shirley. "They are extremely well written," she observed complacently.

"What a giddy girl you were, Shirley, in those days! I remember you so well: a slim, light creature whom, though you were so tall, I could lift off the floor. I see you with your long, countless curls on your shoulders, and your streaming sash. You used to make Mr Moore lively, that is, at first: I believe you grieved him after a while."

Shirley turned the closely-written pages and said nothing. Presently she observed, "That was written one winter afternoon. It was a description of a snow-scene."

"I remember," said Henry; "Mr Moore, when he read it, cried 'Voilà le Français gagné!' He said it was well done. Afterwards, you made him draw, in sepia, the landscape you described."

"You have not forgotten then, Hal?"

"Not at all. We were all scolded that day for not coming down to tea when called. I can remember my tutor sitting at his easel, and you standing behind him, holding the candle, and watching him draw the snowy cliff, the pine, the deer couched under it, and the half-moon hung above."

"Where are his drawings, Henry? Caroline should see them."

"In his portfolio: but it is padlocked: he has the key."

"Ask him for it when he comes in."

"You should ask him, Shirley; you are shy of him now: you are grown a proud lady to him, I notice that."

"Shirley, you are a real enigma," whispered Caroline in her ear. "What queer discoveries I make day by day now! I, who thought I had your confidence. Inexplicable creature! even this boy reproves you."

"I have forgotten 'Auld lang syne,' you see, Harry," said Miss Keeldar, answering young Sympson, and not heeding Caroline.

"Which you never should have done. You don't deserve to be a man's morning star, if you have so short a memory."

"A man's morning star, indeed! and by 'a man' is meant your worshipful self, I suppose? Come, drink your new milk while it is warm."

The young cripple rose and limped towards the fire; he had left his crutch near the mantelpiece.

"My poor lame darling!" murmured Shirley, in her softest voice, aiding him.

"Whether do you like me or Mr Sam Wynne best, Shirley?" inquired the boy, as she settled him in an arm-chair.

"O Harry! Sam Wynne is my aversion! you are my pet."

"Me or Mr Malone?"

"You again, a thousand times."

"Yet they are great whiskered fellows, six feet high each."

"Whereas, as long as you live, Harry, you will never be anything more than a little pale lameter."

"Yes, I know."

"You need not be sorrowful. Have I not often told you who was almost as little, as pale, as suffering as you, and yet potent as a giant, and brave as a lion?"

"Admiral Horatio?"

"Admiral Horatio, Viscount Nelson, and Duke of Bronti; great at heart as a Titan; gallant and heroic as all the world and age of chivalry; leader of the might of England; commander of her strength on the deep; hurler of her thunder over the flood."

"A great man: but I am not warlike, Shirley: and yet my mind is so restless, I burn day and night—for what—I can hardly tell—to be—to do—to suffer, I think."

"Harry, it is your mind, which is stronger and older than your frame, that troubles you. It is a captive. It lies in physical bondage. But it will work its own redemption yet. Study carefully, not only books but the world. You love nature; love her without fear. Be patient—wait the course of time. You will not be a soldier or a sailor, Henry: but, if you live, you will be—listen to my prophecy—you will be an author—perhaps, a poet."

"An author! It is a flash—a flash of light to me! I will—I *will!* I'll write a book that I may dedicate it to you."

"You will write it, that you may give your soul its natural release. Bless me! what am I saying? more than I understand, I believe, or can make good. Here, Hal; here is your toasted oat-cake—eat and live!"

"Willingly!" here cried a voice outside the open window; "I know that fragrance of meal bread. Miss Keeldar, may I come in and partake?"

"Mr Hall" (it was Mr Hall, and with him was Louis Moore, returned from their walk), "there is a proper luncheon laid out in the dining-room, and there

are proper people seated round it: you may join that society and share that fare if you please; but if your ill-regulated tastes lead you to prefer ill-regulated proceedings, step in here, and do as we do."

"I approve the perfume, and therefore shall suffer myself to be led by the nose," returned Mr Hall, who presently entered, accompanied by Louis Moore. That gentleman's eye fell on his desk, pillaged.

"Burglars!" said he. "Henry, you merit the ferule."

"Give it to Shirley and Caroline—they did it," was alleged with more attention to effect than truth.

"Traitor and false witness!" cried both the girls. "We never laid hands on a thing, except in the spirit of laudable inquiry!"

"Exactly so," said Moore, with his rare smile. "And what have you ferreted out, in your 'spirit of laudable inquiry'?"

He perceived the inner drawer open.

"This is empty," said he. "Who has taken"——

"Here! here!" Caroline hastened to say; and she restored the little packet to its place. He shut it up; he locked it in with a small key attached to his watch-guard; he restored the other papers to order, closed the repository, and sat down without further remark.

"I thought you would have scolded much more, sir," said Henry. "The girls deserve reprimand."

"I leave them to their own consciences."

"It accuses them of crimes intended as well as perpetrated, sir. If I had not been here, they would have treated your portfolio as they have done your desk; but I told them it was padlocked."

"And will you have lunch with us?" here interposed Shirley, addressing Moore, and desirous, as it seemed, to turn the conversation.

"Certainly, if I may."

"You will be restricted to new milk and Yorkshire oat-cake."

"Va—pour le lait frais!" said Louis. "But for your oat-cake!"—and he made a grimace.

"He cannot eat it," said Henry: "he thinks it is like bran, raised with sour yeast."

"Come, then, by special dispensation, we will allow him a few cracknels; but nothing less homely."

The hostess rang the bell and gave her frugal orders, which were presently executed. She herself measured out the milk, and distributed the bread round the cosy circle now enclosing the bright little schoolroom fire. She then took the post of toaster-general; and kneeling on the rug, fork in hand, fulfilled her office with dexterity. Mr Hall, who relished any homely innovation on ordinary usages, and to whom the husky oat-cake was from custom suave as manna—seemed in his best spirits. He talked and laughed gleefully—now with Caroline, whom he had fixed by his side, now with Shirley, and again with Louis Moore. And Louis met him in congenial spirit: he did not laugh much, but he uttered in the quietest tone the wittiest things. Gravely spoken sentences, marked by unexpected turns and a quite fresh flavour and poignancy, fell easily from his lips. He proved himself to be—what Mr Hall had said he was—excellent company. Caroline marvelled at his humour, but still more at his entire self-possession. Nobody there present seemed to impose on him a sensation of unpleasant restraint: nobody seemed a bore—a check—a chill to him; and yet there was the cool and lofty Miss Keeldar kneeling before the fire, almost at his feet.

But Shirley was cool and lofty no longer—at least not at this moment. She appeared unconscious of the humility of her present position—or if conscious, it was

only to taste a charm in its lowliness. It did not revolt her pride that the group to whom she voluntarily officiated as handmaid should include her cousin's tutor: it did not scare her that while she handed the bread and milk to the rest, she had to offer it to him also; and Moore took his portion from her hand as calmly as if he had been her equal.

"You are overheated now," he said, when she had retained the fork for some time: "let me relieve you."

And he took it from her with a sort of quiet authority, to which she submitted passively—neither resisting him nor thanking him.

"I should like to see your pictures, Louis," said Caroline, when the sumptuous luncheon was discussed. "Would not you, Mr Hall?"

"To please you, I should; but, for my own part, I have cut him as an artist. I had enough of him in that capacity in Cumberland and Westmoreland. Many a wetting we got amongst the mountains because he would persist in sitting on a camp-stool, catching effects of rain-clouds, gathering mists, fitful sunbeams, and what not."

"Here is the portfolio," said Henry, bringing it in one hand, and leaning on his crutch with the other.

Louis took it, but he still sat as if he wanted another to speak. It seemed as if he would not open it unless the proud Shirley deigned to show herself interested in the exhibition.

"He makes us wait to whet our curiosity," she said.

"You understand opening it," observed Louis, giving her the key. "You spoiled the lock for me once—try now."

He held it: she opened it; and, monopolising the contents, had the first view of every sketch herself. She enjoyed the treat—if treat it were—in silence,

without a single comment. Moore stood behind her chair and looked over her shoulder, and when she had done, and the others were still gazing, he left his post and paced through the room.

A carriage was heard in the lane—the gate-bell rang; Shirley started.

"There are callers," she said, "and I shall be summoned to the room. A pretty figure—as they say—I am to receive company: I and Henry have been in the garden gathering fruit half the morning. Oh, for rest under my own vine and my own fig-tree! Happy is the slave-wife of the Indian chief, in that she has no drawing-room duty to perform, but can sit at ease weaving mats, and stringing beads, and peacefully flattening her picaninny's head in an unmolested corner of her wigwam. I'll emigrate to the western woods."

Louis Moore laughed.

"To marry a White Cloud or a Big Buffalo; and after wedlock to devote yourself to the tender task of digging your lord's maize-field, while he smokes his pipe or drinks fire-water."

Shirley seemed about to reply, but here the school-room door unclosed, admitting Mr Sympson. That personage stood aghast when he saw the group around the fire.

"I thought you alone, Miss Keeldar," he said. "I find quite a party."

And evidently from his shocked, scandalised air—had he not recognised in one of the party a clergyman—he would have delivered an extempore philippic on the extraordinary habits of his niece: respect for the cloth arrested him.

"I merely wished to announce," he proceeded coldly, "that the family from De Walden Hall, Mr, Mrs, the Misses, and Mr Sam Wynne, are in the drawing-room." And he bowed and withdrew.

"The family from De Walden Hall! Couldn't be a worse set," murmured Shirley.

She sat still, looking a little contumacious, and very much indisposed to stir. She was flushed with the fire: her dark hair had been more than once dishevelled by the morning wind that day; her attire was a light, neatly-fitting, but amply flowing dress of muslin; the shawl she had worn in the garden was still draped in a careless fold round her. Indolent, wilful, picturesque, and singularly pretty was her aspect—prettier than usual, as if some soft inward emotion—stirred who knows how?—had given new bloom and expression to her features.

"Shirley, Shirley, you ought to go," whispered Caroline.

"I wonder why?"

She lifted her eyes, and saw in the glass over the fireplace both Mr Hall and Louis Moore gazing at her gravely.

"If," she said, with a yielding smile—"if a majority of the present company maintain that the De Walden Hall people have claims on my civility, I will subdue my inclinations to my duty. Let those who think I ought to go, hold up their hands."

Again consulting the mirror, it reflected an unanimous vote against her.

"You must go," said Mr Hall, "and behave courteously, too. You owe many duties to society. It is not permitted you to please only yourself."

Louis Moore assented with a low "Hear! hear!"

Caroline, approaching her, smoothed her wavy curls, gave to her attire a less artistic and more domestic grace, and Shirley was put out of the room, protesting still, by a pouting lip, against her dismissal.

"There is a curious charm about her," observed Mr Hall, when she was gone. "And now," he added, "I

must away, for Sweeting is off to see his mother, and there are two funerals."

"Henry, get your books; it is lesson-time," said Moore, sitting down to his desk.

"A curious charm!" repeated the pupil, when he and his master were left alone. "True. Is she not a kind of white witch?" he asked.

"Of whom are you speaking, sir?"

"Of my cousin Shirley."

"No irrelevant questions. Study in silence."

Mr Moore looked and spoke sternly—sourly. Henry knew this mood: it was a rare one with his tutor; but when it came he had an awe of it: he obeyed.

Chapter xxvij.

THE FIRST BLUE-STOCKING.

MISS KEELDAR and her uncle had characters that would not harmonise,—that never had harmonised. He was irritable, and she was spirited: he was despotic, and she liked freedom; he was worldly, and she, perhaps, romantic.

Not without purpose had he come down to Yorkshire: his mission was clear, and he intended to discharge it conscientiously: he anxiously desired to have his niece married; to make for her a suitable match: give her in charge to a proper husband, and wash his hands of her for ever.

The misfortune was, from infancy upwards, Shirley and he had disagreed on the meaning of the words "suitable" and "proper." She never yet had accepted his definition; and it was doubtful whether, in the most important step of her life, she would consent to accept it.

The trial soon came.

Mr Wynne proposed in form for his son, Samuel Fawthrop Wynne.

"Decidedly suitable! Most proper!" pronounced Mr Sympson. "A fine unencumbered estate: real substance; good connections. *It must be done!*"

He sent for his niece to the oak parlour; he shut himself up there with her alone; he communicated the offer; he gave his opinion; he claimed her consent.

It was withheld.

"No: I shall not marry Samuel Fawthrop Wynne."

"I ask why? I must have a reason. In all respects he is more than worthy of you."

She stood on the hearth; she was pale as the white marble slab and cornice behind her; her eyes flashed large, dilated, unsmiling.

"And *I* ask in what sense that young man is worthy of *me?*"

"He has twice your money,—twice your common sense;—equal connections,—equal respectability."

"Had he my money counted five score times, I would take no vow to love him."

"Please to state your objections."

"He has run a course of despicable, commonplace profligacy. Accept that as the first reason why I spurn him."

"Miss Keeldar, you shock me!"

"That conduct alone sinks him in a gulf of immeasurable inferiority. His intellect reaches no standard I can esteem:—there is a second stumbling-block. His views are narrow; his feelings are blunt; his tastes are coarse; his manners vulgar."

"The man is a respectable, wealthy man. To refuse him is presumption on your part."

"I refuse, point-blank! Cease to annoy me with the subject: I forbid it!"

"Is it your intention ever to marry, or do you prefer celibacy?"

"I deny your right to claim an answer to that question."

"May I ask if you expect some man of title—some peer of the realm—to demand your hand?"

"I doubt if the peer breathes on whom I would confer it."

"Were there insanity in the family, I should believe you mad. Your eccentricity and conceit touch the verge of frenzy."

"Perhaps, ere I have finished, you will see me overleap it."

"I anticipate no less. Frantic and impracticable girl! Take warning!—I dare you to sully our name by a mésalliance!"

"*Our* name! Am *I* called Sympson?"

"God be thanked that you are not! But be on your guard! I will not be trifled with!"

"What, in the name of common law and common sense, would you, or could you do, if my pleasure led me to a choice you disapproved?"

"Take care! take care!" (warning her with voice and hand that trembled alike.)

"Why? What shadow of power have *you* over me? Why should I fear you?"

"Take care, madam!"

"Scrupulous care I will take, Mr Sympson. Before I marry, I am resolved to esteem—to admire—to *love*."

"Preposterous stuff!—indecorous!—unwomanly!"

"To love with my whole heart. I know I speak in an unknown tongue; but I feel indifferent whether I am comprehended or not."

"And if this love of yours should fall on a beggar?"

"On a beggar it will never fall. Mendicancy is not estimable."

"On a low clerk, a play actor, a play-writer, or—or"——

"Take courage, Mr Sympson! Or what?"

"Any literary scrub, or shabby, whining artist."

"For the scrubby, shabby, whining, I have no taste: for literature and the arts, I have. And there I wonder how your Fawthrop Wynne would suit me? He cannot write a note without orthographical errors; he reads only a sporting paper: he was the booby of Stilbro' grammar school!"

"Unladylike language! Great God!—to what will she come?" He lifted hands and eyes.

"Never to the altar of Hymen with Sam Wynne."

"To what will she come? Why are not the laws more stringent, that I might compel her to hear reason?"

"Console yourself, uncle. Were Britain a serfdom, and you the Czar, you could not *compel* me to this step. *I* will write to Mr Wynne. Give yourself no further trouble on the subject."

Fortune is proverbially called changeful, yet her caprice often takes the form of repeating again and again a similar stroke of luck in the same quarter. It appeared that Miss Keeldar—or her fortune—had by this time made a sensation in the district, and produced an impression in quarters by her unthought of. No less than three offers followed Mr Wynne's—all more or less eligible. All were in succession pressed on her by her uncle, and all in succession she refused. Yet amongst them was more than one gentleman of unexceptional character, as well as ample wealth. Many besides her uncle asked what she meant, and whom she expected to entrap, that she was so insolently fastidious.

At last, the gossips thought they had found the key to her conduct, and her uncle was sure of it; and, what *is more*, the discovery showed his niece to him in quite

a new light, and he changed his whole deportment to her accordingly.

Fieldhead had, of late, been fast growing too hot to hold them both; the suave aunt could not reconcile them; the daughters froze at the view of their quarrels: Gertrude and Isabella whispered by the hour together in their dressing-room, and became chilled with decorous dread if they chanced to be left alone with their audacious cousin. But, as I have said, a change supervened: Mr Sympson was appeased and his family tranquillised.

The village of Nunnely has been alluded to: its old church, its forest, its monastic ruins. It had also its Hall, called the Priory—an older, a larger, a more lordly abode than any Briarfield or Whinbury owned; and, what is more, it had its man of title—its baronet, which neither Briarfield nor Whinbury could boast. This possession—its proudest and most prized—had for years been nominal only: the present baronet, a young man hitherto resident in a distant province, was unknown on his Yorkshire estate.

During Miss Keeldar's stay at the fashionable watering-place of Cliffbridge, she and her friends had met with and been introduced to Sir Philip Nunnely. They encountered him again and again on the sands, the cliffs, in the various walks, sometimes at the public balls of the place. He seemed solitary; his manner was very unpretending—too simple to be termed affable; rather timid than proud: he did not *condescend* to their society—he seemed *glad* of it.

With any unaffected individual, Shirley could easily and quickly cement an acquaintance. She walked and talked with Sir Philip; she, her aunt, and cousins, sometimes took a sail in his yacht. She liked him because she found him kind and modest, and was charmed to feel she had the power to amuse him.

One slight drawback there was—where is the friendship without it?—Sir Philip had a literary turn: he wrote poetry, sonnets, stanzas, ballads. Perhaps Miss Keeldar thought him a little too fond of reading and reciting these compositions; perhaps she wished the rhyme had possessed more accuracy—the measure more music—the tropes more freshness—the inspiration more fire; at any rate, she always winced when he recurred to the subject of his poems, and usually did her best to divert the conversation into another channel.

He would beguile her to take moonlight walks with him on the bridge, for the sole purpose, as it seemed, of pouring into her ear the longest of his ballads: he would lead her away to sequestered rustic seats, whence the rush of the surf to the sands was heard soft and soothing; and when he had her all to himself, and the sea lay before them, and the scented shade of gardens spread round, and the tall shelter of cliffs rose behind them, he would pull out his last batch of sonnets, and read them in a voice tremulous with emotion. He did not seem to know, that though they might be rhyme, they were not poetry. It appeared by Shirley's downcast eye and disturbed face that she knew it, and felt heartily mortified by the single foible of this good and amiable gentleman.

Often she tried, as gently as might be, to wean him from this fanatic worship of the Muses: it was his monomania—on all ordinary subjects he was sensible enough; and fain was she to engage him in ordinary topics. He questioned her sometimes about his place at Nunnely; she was but too happy to answer his interrogatories at length: she never wearied of describing the antique Priory, the wild sylvan park, the hoary church and hamlet; nor did she fail to counsel him to come down and gather his tenantry about him in his ancestral halls.

Somewhat to her surprise Sir Philip followed her

advice to the letter; and actually, towards the close of September, arrived at the Priory.

He soon made a call at Fieldhead, and his first visit was not his last: he said—when he had achieved the round of the neighbourhood—that under no roof had he found such pleasant shelter as beneath the massive oak beams of the grey manor house of Briarfield: a cramped, modest dwelling enough, compared with his own—but he liked it.

Presently, it did not suffice to sit with Shirley in her panelled parlour, where others came and went, and where he could rarely find a quiet moment to show her the latest production of his fertile muse; he must have her out amongst the pleasant pastures, and lead her by the still waters. Tête-à-tête ramblings she shunned; so he made parties for her to his own grounds, his glorious forest; to remoter scenes—woods severed by the Wharfe, vales watered by the Aire.

Such assiduity covered Miss Keeldar with distinction. Her uncle's prophetic soul anticipated a splendid future: he already scented the time afar off when, with nonchalant air, and left foot nursed on his right knee, he should be able to make dashingly-familiar allusions to his "nephew the baronet." Now, his niece dawned upon him no longer "a mad girl," but a "most sensible woman." He termed her, in confidential dialogues with Mrs Sympson, "a truly superior person: peculiar, but very clever." He treated her with exceeding deference; rose reverently to open and shut doors for her; reddened his face, and gave himself headaches, with stooping to pick up gloves, handkerchiefs, and other loose property, whereof Shirley usually held but insecure tenure. He would cut mysterious jokes about the superiority of woman's wit over man's wisdom; commence obscure apologies for the blundering mistake he had committed respecting the generalship, the tactics,

of "a personage not a hundred miles from Fieldhead:" in short, he seemed elate as any "midden cock on pattens."

His niece viewed his manœuvres, and received his innuendoes, with phlegm: apparently, she did not above half-comprehend to what aim they tended. When plainly charged with being the preferred of the baronet, she said, she believed he did like her, and for her part she liked him: she had never thought a man of rank —the only son of a proud, fond mother—the only brother of doting sisters—could have so much goodness, and, on the whole, so much sense.

Time proved, indeed, that Sir Philip liked her. Perhaps he had found in her that "curious charm" noticed by Mr Hall. He sought her presence more and more; and, at last, with a frequency that attested it had become to him an indispensable stimulus. About this time, strange feelings hovered round Fieldhead; restless hopes and haggard anxieties haunted some of its rooms. There was an unquiet wandering of some of the inmates among the still fields round the mansion; there was a sense of expectancy that kept the nerves strained.

One thing seemed clear. Sir Philip was not a man to be despised: he was amiable; if not highly intellectual, he was intelligent. Miss Keeldar could not affirm of him—what she had so bitterly affirmed of Sam Wynne—that his feelings were blunt, his tastes coarse and his manners vulgar. There was sensibility in his nature: there was a very real, if not a very discriminating, love of the arts; there was the English gentleman in all his deportment: as to his lineage and wealth, both were, of course, far beyond her claims.

His appearance had at first elicited some laughing, though not ill-natured, remarks from the merry Shirley. It was boyish: his features were plain and slight; his

hair sandy: his stature insignificant. But she soon checked her sarcasm on this point; she would even fire up if any one else made uncomplimentary allusion thereto. He had "a pleasing countenance," she affirmed; "and there was that in his heart which was better than three Roman noses, than the locks of Absalom, or the proportions of Saul." A spare and rare shaft she still reserved for his unfortunate poetic propensity: but, even here, she would tolerate no irony save her own.

In short, matters had reached a point which seemed fully to warrant an observation made about this time by Mr Yorke, to the tutor, Louis.

"Yond' brother Robert of yours seems to me to be either a fool or a madman. Two months ago, I could have sworn he had the game all in his own hands; and there he runs the country, and quarters himself up in London for weeks together, and by the time he comes back, he'll find himself checkmated. Louis, 'there is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; but, once let slip, never returns again.' I'd write to Robert, if I were you, and remind him of that."

"Robert had views on Miss Keeldar?" inquired Louis, as if the idea were new to him.

"Views I suggested to him myself, and views he might have realised, for she liked him."

"As a neighbour?"

"As more than that. I have seen her change countenance and colour at the mere mention of his name. Write to the lad, I say, and tell him to come home. He is a finer gentleman than this bit of a baronet, after all."

"Does it not strike you, Mr Yorke, that for a mere penniless adventurer to aspire to a rich woman's hand is presumptuous—contemptible?"

"Oh! if you are for high notions, and double-refined sentiment, I've naught to say. I'm a plain, practical man myself; and if Robert is willing to give up that royal prize to a lad-rival—a puling slip of aristocracy—I am quite agreeable. At *his* age, in *his* place, with *his* inducements, I would have acted differently. Neither baronet, nor duke, nor prince, should have snatched my sweetheart from me without a struggle. But you tutors are such solemn chaps: it is almost like speaking to a parson to consult with you."

Flattered and fawned upon as Shirley was just now, it appeared she was not absolutely spoiled—that her better nature did not quite leave her. Universal report had indeed ceased to couple her name with that of Moore, and this silence seemed sanctioned by her own apparent oblivion of the absentee; but that she had not *quite* forgotten him—that she still regarded him, if not with love yet with interest—seemed proved by the increased attention which at this juncture of affairs a sudden attack of illness induced her to show that tutor-brother of Robert's, to whom she habitually bore herself with strange alternations of cool reserve and docile respect: now sweeping past him in all the dignity of the moneyed heiress and prospective Lady Nunnely, and anon accosting him as abashed school-girls are wont to accost their stern professors: bridling her neck of ivory, and curling her lip of carmine, if he encountered her glance, one minute; and the next submitting to the grave rebuke of his eye, with as much contrition as if he had the power to inflict penalties in case of contumacy.

Louis Moore had perhaps caught the fever, which for a few days laid him low, in one of the poor cottages of the district, which he, his lame pupil, and Mr Hall, were in the habit of visiting together. At any rate he

sickened, and after opposing to the malady a taciturn resistance for a day or two, was obliged to keep his chamber.

He lay tossing on his thorny bed one evening, Henry, who would not quit him, watching faithfully beside him, when a tap — too light to be that of Mrs Gill or the housemaid—summoned young Sympson to the door.

"How is Mr Moore to-night?" asked a low voice from the dark gallery.

"Come in and see him yourself."

"Is he asleep?"

"I wish he could sleep. Come and speak to him, Shirley."

"He would not like it."

But the speaker stepped in, and Henry, seeing her hesitate on the threshold, took her hand and drew her to the couch.

The shaded light showed Miss Keeldar's form but imperfectly, yet it revealed her in elegant attire. There was a party assembled below, including Sir Philip Nunnely; the ladies were now in the drawing-room, and their hostess had stolen from them to visit Henry's tutor. Her pure white dress, her fair arms and neck, the trembling chainlet of gold circling her throat, and quivering on her breast, glistened strangely amid the obscurity of the sick-room. Her mien was chastened and pensive: she spoke gently.

"Mr Moore, how are you to-night?"

"I have not been very ill, and am now better."

"I heard that you complained of thirst: I have brought you some grapes: can you taste one?"

"No: but I thank you for remembering me."

"Just one."

From the rich cluster that filled a small basket held in her hand, she severed a berry and offered it to his

lips. He shook his head, and turned aside his flushed face.

"But what then can I bring you instead? You have no wish for fruit; yet I see that your lips are parched. What beverage do you prefer?"

"Mrs Gill supplies me with toast and water: I like it best."

"Silence fell for some minutes.

"Do you suffer? Have you pain?"

"Very little."

"What made you ill?"

Silence.

"I wonder what caused this fever? To what do you attribute it?"

"Miasma, perhaps—malaria. This is autumn, a season fertile in fevers."

"I hear you often visit the sick in Briarfield, and Nunnely too, with Mr Hall: you should be on your guard: temerity is not wise."

"That reminds me, Miss Keeldar, that perhaps you had better not enter this chamber, or come near this couch. I do not believe my illness is infectious: I scarcely fear" (with a sort of smile) "*you* will take it; but why should you run even the shadow of a risk? Leave me."

"Patience: I will go soon; but I should like to do something for you before I depart—any little service"——

"They will miss you below."

"No, the gentlemen are still at table."

"They will not linger long: Sir Philip Nunnely is no wine-bibber, and I hear him just now pass from the dining-room to the drawing-room."

"It is a servant."

"It is Sir Philip, I know his step."

"Your hearing is acute."

"It is never dull, and the sense seems sharpened at present. Sir Philip was here to tea last night. I heard you sing to him some song which he had brought you. I heard him, when he took his departure at eleven o'clock, call you out on to the pavement, to look at the evening star."

"You must be nervously sensitive."

"I heard him kiss your hand."

"Impossible!"

"No; my chamber is over the hall, the window just above the front door, the sash was a little raised, for I felt feverish: you stood ten minutes with him on the steps: I heard your discourse, every word, and I heard the salute. Henry, give me some water."

"Let me give it him."

But he half rose to take the glass from young Sympson, and declined her attendance.

"And can I do nothing?"

"Nothing: for you cannot guarantee me a night's peaceful rest, and it is all I at present want."

"You do not sleep well?"

"Sleep has left me."

"Yet you said you were not very ill?"

"I am often sleepless when in high health."

"If I had power, I would lap you in the most placid slumber; quite deep and hushed, without a dream."

"Blank annihilation! I do not ask that."

"With dreams of all you most desire."

"Monstrous delusions! The sleep would be delirium, the waking death."

"Your wishes are not so chimerical: you are no visionary?"

"Miss Keeldar, I suppose you think so: but my character is not, perhaps, quite as legible to you as a page of the last new novel might be."

"That is possible. . . . But this sleep: I *should*

like to woo it to your pillow—to win for you its favour. If I took a book and sat down, and read some pages——? I can well spare half an hour."

"Thank you, but I will not detain you."

"I would read softly."

"It would not do. I am too feverish and excitable to bear a soft, cooing, vibrating voice close at my ear. You had better leave me."

"Well, I will go."

"And no good-night?"

"Yes, sir, yes. Mr Moore, good-night." (Exit Shirley.)

"Henry, my boy, go to bed now: it is time you had some repose."

"Sir, it would please me to watch at your bedside all night."

"Nothing less called for: I am getting better: there, go."

"Give me your blessing, sir."

"God bless you, my best pupil!"

"You never call me your dearest pupil!"

"No, nor ever shall."

Possibly Miss Keeldar resented her former teacher's rejection of her courtesy: it is certain she did not repeat the offer of it. Often as her light step traversed the gallery in the course of a day, it did not again pause at his door; nor did her "cooing, vibrating voice" disturb a second time the hush of the sick-room. A sick-room, indeed, it soon ceased to be; Mr Moore's good constitution quickly triumphed over his indisposition: in a few days he shook it off, and resumed his duties as tutor.

That "Auld Lang Syne" had still its authority both with preceptor and scholar, was proved by the manner in which he sometimes promptly passed the distance she

usually maintained between them, and put down her high reserve with a firm, quiet hand.

One afternoon the Sympson family were gone out to take a carriage airing. Shirley, never sorry to snatch a reprieve from their society, had remained behind, detained by business, as she said. The business—a little letter-writing—was soon despatched after the yard-gates had closed on the carriage: Miss Keeldar betook herself to the garden.

It was a peaceful autumn day. The gilding of the Indian summer mellowed the pastures far and wide. The russet woods stood ripe to be stript, but were yet full of leaf. The purple of heath-bloom, faded but not withered, tinged the hills. The beck wandered down to the Hollow, through a silent district; no wind followed its course, or haunted its woody borders. Fieldhead gardens bore the seal of gentle decay. On the walks, swept that morning, yellow leaves had fluttered down again. Its time of flowers, and even of fruits, was over; but a scantling of apples enriched the trees; only a blossom here and there expanded pale and delicate amidst a knot of faded leaves.

These single flowers—the last of their race—Shirley culled as she wandered thoughtfully amongst the beds. She was fastening into her girdle a hueless and scentless nosegay, when Henry Sympson called to her as he came limping from the house.

"Shirley, Mr Moore would be glad to see you in the schoolroom and to hear you read a little French, if you have no more urgent occupation."

The messenger delivered his commission very simply, as if it were a mere matter of course.

"Did Mr Moore tell you to say that?"

"Certainly: why not? And now, do come, and let us once more be as we were at Sympson Grove. We used to have pleasant school-hours in those days."

Miss Keeldar, perhaps, thought that circumstances were changed since then; however, she made no remark, but after a little reflection quietly followed Henry.

Entering the schoolroom, she inclined her head with a decent obeisance, as had been her wont in former times; she removed her bonnet, and hung it up beside Henry's cap. Louis Moore sat at his desk, turning the leaves of a book, open before him, and marking passages with his pencil; he just moved, in acknowledgment of her curtsey, but did not rise.

"You proposed to read to me a few nights ago," said he. "I could not hear you then; my attention is now at your service. A little renewed practice in French may not be unprofitable: your accent, I have observed, begins to rust."

"What book shall I take?"

"Here are the posthumous works of St Pièrre. Read a few pages of the 'Fragments de l'Amazone.'"

She accepted the chair which he had placed in readiness near his own—the volume lay on his desk—there was but one between them; her sweeping curls drooped so low as to hide the page from him.

"Put back your hair," he said.

For one moment, Shirley looked not quite certain whether she would obey the request or disregard it: a flicker of her eye beamed furtive on the professor's face; perhaps if he had been looking at her harshly or timidly, or if one undecided line had marked his countenance, she would have rebelled, and the lesson had ended there and then; but he was only awaiting her compliance—as calm as marble, and as cool. She threw the veil of tresses behind her ear. It was well her face owned an agreeable outline, and that her cheek possessed the polish and the roundness of early youth, or, thus robbed of a softening shade, the contours might have lost their grace. But what mattered that in the present

society? Neither Calypso nor Eucharis cared to fascinate Mentor.

She began to read. The language had become strange to her tongue; it faltered; the lecture flowed unevenly, impeded by hurried breath, broken by Anglicised tones. She stopped.

"I can't do it. Read me a paragraph, if you please, Mr Moore."

What *he* read, *she* repeated: she caught his accent in three minutes.

"Très bien," was the approving comment at the close of the piece.

"C'est presque le Français rattrapé, n'est-ce pas?"

"You could not write French as you once could, I dare say?"

"Oh! no. I should make strange work of my concords now."

"You could not compose the devoir of 'La Première Femme Savante'?"

"Do you still remember that rubbish?"

"Every line."

"I doubt you."

"I will engage to repeat it word for word."

"You would stop short at the first line."

"Challenge me to the experiment."

"I challenge you."

He proceeded to recite the following: he gave it in French, but we must translate, on pain of being unintelligible to some readers.

"And it came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."

This was in the dawn of time, before the morning stars were set, and while they yet sang together.

The epoch is so remote, the mists and dewy grey of matin twilight veil it with so vague an obscurity, that all distinct feature of custom, all clear line of locality, evade perception and baffle research. It must suffice to know that the world then existed; that men peopled it; that man's nature, with its passions, sympathies, pains, and pleasures, informed the planet and gave it soul.

A certain tribe colonised a certain spot on the globe; of what race this tribe—unknown: in what region that spot—untold. We usually think of the East when we refer to transactions of that date; but who shall declare that there was no life in the West, the South, the North? What is to disprove that this tribe, instead of camping under palm-groves in Asia, wandered beneath island oak-woods rooted in our own seas of Europe?

It is no sandy plain, nor any circumscribed and scant oasis I seem to realise. A forest valley, with rocky sides and brown profundity of shade, formed by tree crowding on tree, descends deep before me. Here, indeed, dwell human beings, but so few, and in alleys so thick branched and over-arched, they are neither heard nor seen. Are they savage?—doubtless. They live by the crook and the bow: half shepherds, half hunters, their flocks wander wild as their prey. Are they happy?—no: not more happy than we are at this day. Are they good?—no: not better than ourselves: their nature is our nature—human both. There is one in this tribe too often miserable—a child bereaved of both parents. None cares for this child: she is fed sometimes, but oftener forgotten: a hut rarely receives her: the hollow tree and chill cavern are her home. Forsaken, lost, and wandering, she lives more with the wild beast and bird than with her own kind. Hunger and cold are her comrades: sadness hovers over, and solitude besets her round. Unheeded and unvalued,

she should die: but she both lives and grows: the green wilderness nurses her, and becomes to her a mother: feeds her on juicy berry, on saccharine root and nut.

There is something in the air of this clime which fosters life kindly: there must be something, too, in its dews, which heals with sovereign balm. Its gentle seasons exaggerate no passion, no sense; its temperature tends to harmony; its breezes, you would say, bring down from heaven the germ of pure thought, and purer feeling. Not grotesquely fantastic are the forms of cliff and foliage; not violently vivid the colouring of flower and bird: in all the grandeur of these forests there is repose; in all their freshness there is tenderness.

The gentle charm vouchsafed to flower and tree,—bestowed on deer and dove,—has not been denied to the human nursling. All solitary, she has sprung up straight and graceful. Nature cast her features in a fine mould; they have matured in their pure, accurate first lines, unaltered by the shocks of disease. No fierce dry blast has dealt rudely with the surface of her frame; no burning sun has crisped or withered her tresses: her form gleams ivory-white through the trees; her hair flows plenteous, long, and glossy; her eyes, not dazzled by vertical fires, beam in the shade large and open, and full and dewy: above those eyes, when the breeze bares her forehead, shines an expanse fair and ample,—a clear, candid page, whereon knowledge, should knowledge ever come, might write a golden record. You see in the desolate young savage nothing vicious or vacant; she haunts the wood harmless and thoughtful: though of what one so untaught can think, it is not easy to divine.

On the evening of one summer day, before the Flood, being utterly alone—for she had lost all trace of her tribe, who had wandered leagues away, she knew not where,—she went up from the vale, to watch Day take

leave and Night arrive. A crag, overspread by a tree, was her station: the oak-roots, turfed and mossed, gave a seat: the oak-boughs, thick-leaved, wove a canopy.

Slow and grand the Day withdrew, passing in purple fire, and parting to the farewell of a wild, low chorus from the woodlands. Then Night entered, quiet as death: the wind fell, the birds ceased singing. Now every nest held happy mates, and hart and hind slumbered blissfully safe in their lair.

The girl sat, her body still, her soul astir; occupied, however, rather in feeling than in thinking,—in wishing, than hoping,—in imagining, than projecting. She felt the world, the sky, the night, boundlessly mighty. Of all things, herself seemed to herself the centre,—a small, forgotten atom of life, a spark of soul, emitted inadvertent from the great creative source, and now burning unmarked to waste in the heart of a black hollow. She asked, was she thus to burn out and perish, her living light doing no good, never seen, never needed,—a star in an else starless firmament,—which nor shepherd, nor wanderer, nor sage, nor priest, tracked as a guide, or read as a prophecy? Could this be, she demanded, when the flame of her intelligence burned so vivid; when her life beat so true, and real, and potent; when something within her stirred disquieted, and restlessly asserted a God-given strength, for which it insisted she should find exercise?

She gazed abroad on Heaven and Evening: Heaven and Evening gazed back on her. She bent down, searching bank, hill, river, spread dim below. All she questioned responded by oracles: she heard,—she was impressed; but she could not understand. Above her head she raised her hands joined together.

"Guidance—help—comfort—come!" was her cry.

There was no voice, nor any that answered.

She waited, kneeling, steadfastly looking up. Yonder

sky was sealed: the solemn stars shone alien and remote.

At last, one over-stretched chord of her agony slacked: she thought Something above relented: she felt as if Something far round drew nigher: she heard as if Silence spoke. There was no language, no word, only a tone.

Again—a fine, full, lofty tone, a deep, soft sound, like a storm whispering, made twilight undulate.

Once more, profounder, nearer, clearer, it rolled harmonious.

Yet, again—a distinct voice passed between Heaven and Earth.

"Eva!"

If Eva were not this woman's name, she had none. She rose.

"Here am I."

"Eva!"

"Oh, Night! (it can be but Night that speaks) I am here!"

The voice, descending, reached Earth.

"Eva!"

"Lord!" she cried, "behold thine handmaid!"

She had her religion: all tribes held some creed.

"I come: a Comforter!"

"Lord, come quickly!"

The Evening flushed full of hope: the Air panted; the Moon—rising before—ascended large, but her light showed no shape.

"Lean towards me, Eva. Enter my arms; repose thus."

"Thus I lean, O Invisible, but felt! And what art thou?"

"Eva, I have brought a living draught from heaven. Daughter of Man, drink of my cup!"

"I drink—it is as if sweetest dew visited my lips in

a full current. My arid heart revives: my affliction is lightened: my strait and struggle are gone. And the night changes! the wood, the hill, the moon, the wide sky—all change!"

"All change, and for ever. I take from thy vision, darkness: I loosen from thy faculties, fetters! I level in thy path, obstacles: I, with my presence, fill vacancy: I claim as mine the lost atom of life: I take to myself the spark of soul—burning, heretofore, forgotten!"

"Oh, take me! Oh, claim me! This is a god."

"This is a son of God: one who feels himself in the portion of life that stirs you: he is suffered to reclaim his own, and so to foster and aid that it shall not perish hopeless."

"A son of God! Am I indeed chosen?"

"Thou only in this land. I saw thee that thou wert fair: I knew thee that thou wert mine. To me it is given to rescue, to sustain, to cherish, mine own. Acknowledge in me that Seraph on earth, named Genius."

"My glorious Bridegroom! True Dayspring from on high! All I would have, at last I possess. I receive a revelation. The dark hint, the obscure whisper, which have haunted me from childhood, are interpreted. Thou art He I sought. Godborn, take me, thy bride!"

"Unhumbled, I can take what is mine. Did I not give from the altar the very flame which lit Eva's being? Come again into the heaven whence thou wert sent."

That Presence, invisible, but mighty, gathered her in like a lamb to the fold; that voice, soft, but all-pervading, vibrated through her heart like music. Her eye received no image: and yet a sense visited her vision and her brain as of the serenity of stainless air, the power of sovereign seas, the majesty of marching stars,

the energy of colliding elements, the rooted endurance of hills wide based, and, above all, as of the lustre of heroic beauty rushing victorious on the Night, vanquishing its shadows like a diviner sun.

Such was the bridal-hour of Genius and Humanity. Who shall rehearse the tale of their after-union? Who shall depict its bliss and bale? Who shall tell how He, between whom and the Woman God put enmity, forged deadly plots to break the bond or defile its purity? Who shall record the long strife between Serpent and Seraph? How still the Father of Lies insinuated evil into good —pride into wisdom—grossness into glory—pain into bliss—poison into passion? How the "dreadless Angel" defied, resisted, and repelled? How, again and again, he refined the polluted cup, exalted the debased emotion, rectified the perverted impulse, detected the lurking venom, baffled the frontless temptation—purified, justified, watched, and withstood? How, by his patience, by his strength, by that unutterable excellence he held from God—his Origin—this faithful Seraph fought for Humanity a good fight through time; and, when Time's course closed, and Death was encountered at the end, barring with fleshless arms the portals of Eternity, how Genius still held close his dying bride, sustained her through the agony of the passage, bore her triumphant into his own home—Heaven; restored her, redeemed, to Jehovah—her Maker; and at last, before Angel and Archangel, crowned her with the crown of Immortality.

Who shall, of these things, write the chronicle?

"I never could correct that composition," observed Shirley, as Moore concluded. "Your censor-pencil scored it with condemnatory lines, whose signification I strove vainly to fathom."

She had taken a crayon from the tutor's desk, and

was drawing little leaves, fragments of pillars, broken crosses, on the margin of the book.

"French may be half-forgotten, but the habits of the French lesson are retained, I see," said Louis: "my books would now, as erst, be unsafe with you. My newly bound St Pièrre would soon be like my Racine: Miss Keeldar, her mark—traced on every page."

Shirley dropped her crayon as if it burned her fingers.

"Tell me what were the faults of that devoir?" she asked. "Were they grammatical errors, or did you object to the substance?"

"I never said that the lines I drew were indications of faults at all. You would have it that such was the case, and I refrained from contradiction."

"What else did they denote?"

"No matter now."

"Mr Moore," cried Henry, "make Shirley repeat some of the pieces she used to say so well by heart."

"If I ask for any, it will be 'Le Cheval Dompté,'" said Moore, trimming with his pen-knife the pencil Miss Keeldar had worn to a stump.

She turned aside her head; the neck, the clear cheek, forsaken by their natural veil, were seen to flush warm.

"Ah! she has not forgotten, you see, sir," said Henry, exultant. "She knows how naughty she was."

A smile, which Shirley would not permit to expand, made her lip tremble; she bent her face, and hid it half with her arms, half in her curls, which, as she stooped, fell loose again.

"Certainly, I was a rebel!" she answered.

"A rebel!" repeated Henry. "Yes: you and papa had quarrelled terribly, and you set both him and mamma, and Mrs Pryor, and everybody, at defiance: you said he had insulted you"——

"He *had* insulted me," interposed Shirley.

"And you wanted to leave Sympson Grove directly. You packed your things up, and papa threw them out of your trunk; mamma cried—Mrs Pryor cried; they both stood wringing their hands begging you to be patient, and you knelt on the floor with your things and your upturned box before you, looking, Shirley—looking—why, in one of *your* passions. Your features, in such passions, are not distorted; they are fixed, but quite beautiful: you scarcely look angry, only resolute, and in a certain haste; yet one feels that, at such times, an obstacle cast across your path would be split as with lightning. Papa lost heart, and called Mr Moore."

"Enough, Henry."

"No: it is not enough. I hardly know how Mr Moore managed, except that I recollect he suggested to papa that agitation would bring on his gout; and then he spoke quietly to the ladies, and got them away; and afterwards he said to you, Miss Shirley, that it was of no use talking or lecturing now, but that the tea-things were just brought into the schoolroom, and he was very thirsty, and he would be glad if you would leave your packing for the present and come and make a cup of tea for him and me. You came: you would not talk at first; but soon you softened and grew cheerful. Mr Moore began to tell us about the Continent, the war, and Bonaparte; subjects we were both fond of listening to. After tea he said we should neither of us leave him that evening: he would not let us stray out of his sight, lest we should again get into mischief. We sat one on each side of him: we were so happy. I never passed so pleasant an evening. The next day he gave you, missy, a lecture of an hour, and wound it up by marking you a piece to learn in Bossuet as a punishment-lesson—'Le Cheval Dompté.' You learned it instead of packing up, Shirley. We heard no more of your

running away. Mr Moore used to tease you on the subject for a year afterwards."

"She never said a lesson with greater spirit," subjoined Moore. "She then, for the first time, gave me the treat of hearing my native tongue spoken without accent by an English girl."

"She was as sweet as summer-cherries for a month afterwards," struck in Henry: "a good hearty quarrel always left Shirley's temper better than it found it."

"You talk of me as if I were not present," observed Miss Keeldar, who had not yet lifted her face.

"Are you sure you *are* present?" asked Moore: "there have been moments since my arrival here, when I have been tempted to inquire of the lady of Fieldhead if she knew what had become of my former pupil?"

"She is here now."

"I see her, and humble enough; but I would neither advise Harry, nor others, to believe too implicitly in the humility which one moment can hide its blushing face like a modest little child, and the next lift it pale and lofty as a marble Juno."

"One man in times of old, it is said, imparted vitality to the statue he had chiselled. Others may have the contrary gift of turning life to stone."

Moore paused on this observation before he replied to it. His look, at once struck and meditative, said, "A strange phrase: what may it mean?" He turned it over in his mind, with thought deep and slow, as some German pondering metaphysics.

"You mean," he said at last, "that some men inspire repugnance, and so chill the kind heart."

"Ingenious!" responded Shirley. "If the interpretation pleases you, you are welcome to hold it valid. *I* don't care."

And with that she raised her head, lofty in look, and statue-like in hue, as Louis had described it.

"Behold the metamorphosis!" he said: "scarce imagined ere it is realised: a lowly nymph develops to an inaccessible goddess. But Henry must not be disappointed of his recitation, and Olympia will deign to oblige him. Let us begin."

"I have forgotten the very first line."

"Which I have not. *My* memory, if a slow, is a retentive one. I acquire deliberately both knowledge and liking: the acquisition grows into my brain, and the sentiment into my breast; and it is not as the rapid springing produce which, having no root in itself, flourishes verdurous enough for a time, but too soon falls withered away. Attention, Henry! Miss Keeldar consents to favour you. 'Voyez ce Cheval ardent et impétueux,' so it commences."

Miss Keeldar did consent to make the effort; but she soon stopped.

"Unless I heard the whole repeated, I cannot continue it," she said.

"Yet it was quickly learned, 'soon gained, soon gone,'" moralised the tutor. He recited the passage deliberately, accurately, with slow, impressive emphasis.

Shirley, by degrees, inclined her ear as he went on. Her face, before turned from him, *re*turned towards him. When he ceased, she took the word up as if from his lips: she took his very tone; she seized his very accent; she delivered the periods as he had delivered them: she reproduced his manner, his pronunciation, his expression.

It was now her turn to petition.

"Recall 'Le Songe d'Athalie,'" she entreated, "and say it."

He said it for her; she took it from him; she found lively excitement in the pleasure of making his language her own: she asked for further indulgence; all the old

school-pieces were revived, and with them Shirley's old school-days.

He had gone through some of the best passages of Racine and Corneille, and then had heard the echo of his own deep tones in the girl's voice, that modulated itself faithfully on his:—"Le Chêne et le Roseau," that most beautiful of La Fontaine's fables, had been recited, well recited by the tutor, and the pupil had animatedly availed herself of the lesson. Perhaps a simultaneous feeling seized them now, that their enthusiasm had kindled to a glow, which the slight fuel of French poetry no longer sufficed to feed; perhaps they longed for a trunk of English oak to be thrown as a Yule log to the devouring flame. Moore observed—"And these are our best pieces! And we have nothing more dramatic, nervous, natural!"

And then he smiled and was silent. His whole nature seemed serenely alight: he stood on the hearth, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, musing not unblissfully. Twilight was closing on the diminished autumn day: the schoolroom windows—darkened with creeping plants, from which no high October winds had as yet swept the sere foliage—admitted scarce a gleam of sky; but the fire gave light enough to talk by.

And now Louis Moore addressed his pupil in French; and she answered, at first, with laughing hesitation and in broken phrase: Moore encouraged while he corrected her; Henry joined in the lesson; the two scholars stood opposite the master, their arms round each other's waists: Tartar, who long since had craved and obtained admission, sat sagely in the centre of the rug, staring at the blaze which burst fitful from morsels of coal among the red cinders: the group were happy enough, but—

> "Pleasures are like poppies spread;
> You seize the flower—its bloom is shed."

The dull, rumbling sound of wheels was heard on the pavement in the yard.

"It is the carriage returned," said Shirley; "and dinner must be just ready, and I am not dressed."

A servant came in with Mr Moore's candle and tea: for the tutor and his pupil usually dined at luncheon time.

"Mr Sympson and the ladies are returned," she said, "and Sir Philip Nunnely is with them."

"How you did start, and how your hand trembled, Shirley!" said Henry, when the maid had closed the shutter and was gone. "But I know why—don't you, Mr Moore? I know what papa intends. He is a little ugly man, that Sir Philip. I wish he had not come: I wish sisters and all of them had stayed at De Walden Hall to dine. Shirley should once more have made tea for you and me, Mr Moore, and we would have had a happy evening of it."

Moore was locking up his desk, and putting away his St Pièrre—"That was *your* plan—was it, my boy?"

"Don't you approve it, sir?"

"I approve nothing Utopian. Look Life in its iron face: stare Reality out of its brassy countenance. Make the tea, Henry; I shall be back in a minute."

He left the room: so did Shirley, by another door.

Chapter xxviij.

PHŒBE.

SHIRLEY probably got on pleasantly with Sir Philip that evening, for the next morning she came down in one of her best moods.

"Who will take a walk with me?" she asked, after breakfast. "Isabella and Gertrude—will you?"

So rare was such an invitation from Miss Keeldar to

her female cousins that they hesitated before they accepted it. Their mamma, however, signifying acquiescence in the project, they fetched their bonnets, and the trio set out.

It did not suit these three young persons to be thrown much together; Miss Keeldar liked the society of few ladies: indeed, she had a cordial pleasure in that of none except Mrs Pryor and Caroline Helstone. She was civil, kind, attentive even to her cousins; but still she usually had little to say to them. In the sunny mood of this particular morning, she contrived to entertain even the Misses Sympson. Without deviating from her wonted rule of discussing with them only ordinary themes, she imparted to these themes an extraordinary interest: the sparkle of her spirit glanced along her phrases.

What made her so joyous? All the cause must have been in herself. The day was not bright; it was dim—a pale, waning autumn day: the walks through the dun woods were damp; the atmosphere was heavy, the sky overcast; and yet, it seemed that in Shirley's heart lived all the light and azure of Italy, as all its fervour laughed in her grey English eye.

Some directions necessary to be given to her foreman, John, delayed her behind her cousins as they neared Fieldhead on their return; perhaps an interval of twenty minutes elapsed between her separation from them and her re-entrance into the house: in the meantime she had spoken to John, and then she had lingered in the lane at the gate. A summons to luncheon called her in: she excused herself from the meal, and went upstairs.

"Is not Shirley coming to luncheon?" asked Isabella: "she said she was not hungry."

An hour after, as she did not quit her chamber, one of her cousins went to seek her there. She was found

sitting at the foot of the bed, her head resting on her hand: she looked quite pale, very thoughtful, almost sad.

"You are not ill?" was the question put.

"A little sick," replied Miss Keeldar.

Certainly she was not a little changed from what she had been two hours before.

This change, accounted for only by those three words, explained no otherwise; this change—whencesoever springing, effected in a brief ten minutes—passed like no light summer cloud. She talked when she joined her friends at dinner, talked as usual; she remained with them during the evening; when again questioned respecting her health, she declared herself perfectly recovered: it had been a mere passing faintness: a momentary sensation, not worth a thought: yet it was felt there was a difference in Shirley.

The next day—the day—the week—the fortnight after—this new and peculiar shadow lingered on the countenance, in the manner of Miss Keeldar. A strange quietude settled over her look, her movements, her very voice. The alteration was not so marked as to court or permit frequent questioning, yet it *was* there, and it would not pass away: it hung over her like a cloud which no breeze could stir or disperse. Soon it became evident that to notice this change was to annoy her. First she shrunk from remark; and, if persisted in, she, with her own peculiar hauteur, repelled it. "Was she ill?" The reply came with decision.

"I *am not.*"

"Did anything weigh on her mind? Had anything happened to affect her spirits?"

She scornfully ridiculed the idea. "What did they mean by spirits? She had no spirits, black or white, blue or grey, to affect."

"Something must be the matter — she was so altered."

"She supposed she had a right to alter at her ease. She knew she was plainer: if it suited her to grow ugly, why need others fret themselves on the subject."

"There must be a cause for the change—what was it?"

She peremptorily requested to be let alone.

Then she would make every effort to appear quite gay, and she seemed indignant at herself that she could not perfectly succeed: brief, self-spurning epithets burst from her lips when alone. "Fool! coward!" she would term herself. "Poltroon!" she would say: "if you must tremble—tremble in secret! Quail where no eye sees you!"

"How dare you"—she would ask herself—"how dare you show your weakness and betray your imbecile anxieties? Shake them off: rise above them: if you cannot do this, hide them."

And to hide them she did her best. She once more became resolutely lively in company. When weary of effort and forced to relax, she sought solitude: not the solitude of her chamber—she refused to mope, shut up between four walls—but that wilder solitude which lies out of doors, and which she could chase, mounted on Zoë, her mare. She took long rides of half a day. Her uncle disapproved, but he dared not remonstrate: it was never pleasant to face Shirley's anger, even when she was healthy and gay; but now that her face showed thin, and her large eye looked hollow, there was something in the darkening of that face and kindling of that eye which touched as well as alarmed.

To all comparative strangers who, unconscious of the alterations in her spirits, commented on the alteration in her looks, she had one reply—

"I am perfectly well: I have not an ailment."

And health, indeed, she must have had, to be able to bear the exposure to the weather she now encountered. Wet or fair, calm or storm, she took her daily ride over Stilbro' Moor, Tartar keeping up at her side, with his wolf-like gallop, long and untiring.

Twice—three times, the eyes of gossips—those eyes which are everywhere: in the closet and on the hill-top —noticed that instead of turning on Rushedge, the top-ridge of Stilbro' Moor, she rode forwards all the way to the town. Scouts were not wanting to mark her destination there; it was ascertained that she alighted at the door of one Mr Pearson Hall, a solicitor, related to the Vicar of Nunnely: this gentleman and his ancestors had been the agents of the Keeldar family for generations back: some people affirmed that Miss Keeldar was become involved in business speculations connected with Hollow's Mill; that she had lost money, and was constrained to mortgage her land: others conjectured that she was going to be married, and that the settlements were preparing.

Mr Moore and Henry Sympson were together in the schoolroom: the tutor was waiting for a lesson which the pupil seemed busy in preparing.

"Henry, make haste! the afternoon is getting on."

"Is it, sir?"

"Certainly. Are you nearly ready with that lesson?"

"No."

"Not *nearly* ready?"

"I have not construed a line."

Mr Moore looked up: the boy's tone was rather peculiar.

"The task presents no difficulties, Henry; or, if it does, bring them to me: we will work together."

"Mr Moore, I can do no work."

"My boy, you are ill."

"Sir, I am not worse in bodily health than usual, but my heart is full."

"Shut the book. Come hither, Harry. Come to the fireside."

Harry limped forward; his tutor placed him in a chair: his lips were quivering, his eyes brimming. He laid his crutch on the floor, bent down his head, and wept.

"This distress is not occasioned by physical pain, you say, Harry? You have a grief—tell it me."

"Sir, I have such a grief as I never had before. I wish it could be relieved in some way: I can hardly bear it."

"Who knows but, if we talk it over, we may relieve it? What is the cause? Whom does it concern?"

"The cause, sir, is Shirley: it concerns Shirley."

"Does it? . . . You think her changed?"

"All who know her think her changed: you too, Mr Moore."

"Not seriously,—no. I see no alteration but such as a favourable turn might repair in a few weeks: besides, her own word must go for something: she says she is well."

"There it is, sir: as long as she maintained she was well, I believed her. When I was sad out of her sight, I soon recovered spirits in her presence. Now . . ."

"Well, Harry, now . . .? Has she said anything to you? You and she were together in the garden two hours this morning: I saw her talking, and you listening. Now, my dear Harry! if Miss Keeldar has said she is ill, and enjoined you to keep her secret, do not obey her. For her life's sake, avow everything. Speak, my boy!"

"*She* say she is ill! I believe, sir, if she were dying, she would smile, and aver 'Nothing ails me.'"

"What have you learned, then? What new circumstance . . .?

"I have learned that she has just made her will."

"Made her will?"

The tutor and pupil were silent.

"She told you that?" asked Moore, when some minutes had elapsed.

"She told me quite cheerfully: not as an ominous circumstance, which I felt it to be. She said I was the only person besides her solicitor, Pearson Hall, and Mr Helstone and Mr Yorke, who knew anything about it; and to me, she intimated, she wished specially to explain its provisions."

"Go on, Harry."

"'Because,' she said, looking down on me with her beautiful eyes,—oh! they *are* beautiful, Mr Moore! I love them,—I love her! She is my star! Heaven must not claim her! She is lovely in this world, and fitted for this world. Shirley is not an angel; she is a woman, and she shall live with men. Seraphs shall not have her! Mr Moore—if one of the 'sons of God,' with wings wide and bright as the sky, blue and sounding as the sea, having seen that she was fair, descended to claim her, his claim should be withstood—withstood by me—boy and cripple as I am!"

"Henry Sympson, go on, when I tell you."

"'Because,' she said, 'if I made no will, and died before you, Harry, all my property would go to you; and I do not intend that it should be so, though your father would like it. But you,' she said, 'will have his whole estate, which is large—larger than Fieldhead; your sisters will have nothing, so I have left them some money: though I do not love them, both together, half so much as I love one lock of your fair hair.' She said these words, and she called me her 'darling,' and let me kiss her. She went on to tell me that she had left Caroline

Helstone some money too; that this manor-house, with its furniture and books, she had bequeathed to me, as she did not choose to take the old family place from her own blood; and that all the rest of her property, amounting to about twelve thousand pounds, exclusive of the legacies to my sisters and Miss Helstone, she had willed, not to me, seeing I was already rich, but to a good man, who would make the best use of it that any human being could do: a man, she said, that was both gentle and brave, strong and merciful; a man that might not profess to be pious, but she knew he had the secret of religion pure and undefiled before God. The spirit of love and peace was with him: he visited the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and kept himself unspotted from the world. Then she asked, 'Do you approve what I have done, Harry?' I could not answer,—my tears choked me, as they do now."

Mr Moore allowed his pupil a moment to contend with and master his emotion: he then demanded—"What else did she say?"

"When I had signified my full consent to the conditions of her will, she told me I was a generous boy, and she was proud of me: 'And now,' she added, 'in case anything should happen, you will know what to say to Malice when she comes whispering hard things in your ear, insinuating that Shirley has wronged you; that she did not love you. You will know that I *did* love you, Harry; that no sister could have loved you better, my own treasure.' Mr Moore, sir, when I remember her voice, and recall her look, my heart beats as if it would break its strings. She *may* go to heaven before me—if God commands it, she *must*; but the rest of my life—and my life will not be long—I am glad of that now—shall be a straight, quick, thoughtful journey in the path her step has pressed. I thought to

enter the vault of the Keeldars before her: should it be otherwise, lay my coffin by Shirley's side."

Moore answered him with a weighty calm, that offered a strange contrast to the boy's perturbed enthusiasm.

"You are wrong, both of you—you harm each other. If youth once falls under the influence of a shadowy terror, it imagines there will never be full sunlight again, its first calamity it fancies will last a lifetime. What more did she say? Anything more?"

"We settled one or two family points between ourselves."

"I should rather like to know what"——

"But, Mr Moore, you smile—*I* could not smile to see Shirley in such a mood."

"My boy, I am neither nervous, nor poetic, nor inexperienced. I see things as they are: you don't as yet. Tell me these family points."

"Only, sir, she asked me whether I considered myself most of a Keeldar or a Sympson; and I answered I was Keeldar to the core of the heart, and to the marrow of the bones. She said she was glad of it; for, besides her, I was the only Keeldar left in England: and then we agreed on some matters."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, that if I lived to inherit my father's estate, and her house, I was to take the name of Keeldar, and to make Fieldhead my residence. Henry Shirley Keeldar I said I would be called: and I will. Her name and her manor-house are ages old, and Sympson and Sympson Grove are of yesterday."

"Come, you are neither of you going to heaven yet. I have the best hopes of you both, with your proud distinctions—a pair of half-fledged eaglets. Now, what is your inference from all you have told me? Put it into words."

"That Shirley thinks she is going to die."

"She referred to her health?"

"Not once; but I assure you she is wasting: her hands are growing quite thin, and so is her cheek."

"Does she ever complain to your mother or sisters?"

"Never. She laughs at them when they question her. Mr Moore, she is a strange being—so fair and girlish: not a manlike woman at all—not an Amazon, and yet lifting her head above both help and sympathy."

"Do you know where she is now, Henry? Is she in the house, or riding out?"

"Surely not out, sir—it rains fast."

"True: which, however, is no guarantee that she is not at this moment cantering over Rushedge. Of late she has never permitted weather to be a hindrance to her rides."

"You remember, Mr Moore, how wet and stormy it was last Wednesday? so wild, indeed, that she would not permit Zoë to be saddled; yet the blast she thought too tempestuous for her mare, she herself faced on foot; that afternoon she walked nearly as far as Nunnely. I asked her, when she came in, if she was not afraid of taking cold. 'Not I,' she said, 'it would be too much good luck for me. I don't know, Harry; but the best thing that could happen to me would be to take a good cold and fever, and so pass off like other Christians.' She is reckless, you see, sir."

"Reckless indeed! Go and find out where she is; and if you can get an opportunity of speaking to her, without attracting attention, request her to come here a minute."

"Yes, sir."

He snatched his crutch, and started up to go.

"Harry!"

He returned.

"Do not deliver the message formally. Word it as,

in former days, you would have worded an ordinary summons to the schoolroom."

"I see, sir; she will be more likely to obey."

"And Harry"——

"Sir?"

"I will call you when I want you: till then, you are dispensed from lessons."

He departed. Mr Moore, left alone, rose from his desk.

"I can be very cool and very supercilious with Henry," he said. "I can seem to make light of his apprehensions, and look down 'du haut de ma grandeur' on his youthful ardour. To *him* I can speak as if, in my eyes, they were both children. Let me see if I can keep up the same rôle with her. I have known the moment when I seemed about to forget it; when Confusion and Submission seemed about to crush me with their soft tyranny; when my tongue faltered, and I have almost let the mantle drop, and stood in her presence, not master—no—but something else. I trust I shall never so play the fool: it is well for a Sir Philip Nunnely to redden when he meets her eye: he may permit himself the indulgence of submission—he may even without disgrace suffer his hand to tremble when it touches hers; but if one of her farmers were to show himself susceptible and sentimental, he would merely prove his need of a strait waistcoat. So far I have always done very well. She has sat near me, and I have not shaken—more than my desk. I have encountered her looks and smiles like—why, like a tutor, as I am. Her hand I never yet touched—never underwent that test. Her farmer or her footman I am not—no serf nor servant of hers have I ever been: but I am poor, and it behoves me to look to my self-respect—not to compromise an inch of it. What did she mean by that allusion to the cold people who petrify

flesh to marble? It pleased me—I hardly know why—I would not permit myself to inquire—I never do indulge in scrutiny either of her language or countenance; for if I did, I should sometimes forget Common Sense and believe in Romance. A strange, secret ecstacy steals through my veins at moments: I'll not encourage—I'll not remember it. I am resolved, as long as may be, to retain the right to say with Paul—'I am not mad, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.'"

He paused—listening.

"Will she come, or will she not come?" he inquired. "How will she take the message? naïvely or disdainfully? like a child or like a queen? Both characters are in her nature.

"If she comes, what shall I say to her? How account, firstly, for the freedom of the request? Shall I apologise to her? I could in all humility; but would an apology tend to place us in the positions we ought relatively to occupy in this matter? I *must* keep up the professor, otherwise—I hear a door"——

He waited. Many minutes passed.

"She will refuse me. Henry is entreating her to come: she declines. My petition is presumption in her eyes: let her *only* come, I can teach her to the contrary. I would rather she were a little perverse—it will steel me. I prefer her, cuirassed in pride, armed with a taunt. Her scorn startles me from my dreams—I stand up myself. A sarcasm from her eyes or lips puts strength into every nerve and sinew I have. Some step approaches, and not Henry's. . . ."

The door unclosed; Miss Keeldar came in. The message, it appeared, had found her at her needle: she brought her work in her hand. That day she had not been riding out: she had evidently passed it quietly. She wore her neat indoor dress and silk apron. This

was no Thalestris from the fields, but a quiet domestic character from the fireside. Mr Moore had her at advantage: he should have addressed her at once in solemn accents, and with rigid mien; perhaps he would, had she looked saucy; but her air never showed less of crâniere; a soft kind of youthful shyness depressed her eyelid and mantled on her cheek. The tutor stood silent.

She made a full stop between the door and his desk.

"Did you want me, sir?" she asked.

"I ventured, Miss Keeldar, to send for you—that is, to ask an interview of a few minutes."

She waited: she plied her needle.

"Well, sir" (not lifting her eyes)—"what about?"

"Be seated first. The subject I would broach is one of some moment: perhaps I have hardly a right to approach it: it is possible I ought to frame an apology: it is possible no apology can excuse me. The liberty I have taken arises from a conversation with Henry. The boy is unhappy about your health: all your friends are unhappy on that subject. It is of your health I would speak."

"I am quite well," she said briefly.

"Yet changed."

"That matters to none but myself. We all change."

"Will you sit down? Formerly, Miss Keeldar, I had some influence with you—have I any now? May I feel that what I am saying is not accounted positive presumption?"

"Let me read some French, Mr Moore, or I will even take a spell at the Latin grammar, and let us proclaim a truce to all sanitary discussions."

"No—no: it is time there were discussions."

"Discuss away, then, but do not choose me for your text; I am a healthy subject."

"Do you not think it wrong to affirm and reaffirm what is substantially untrue?"

"I say I am well: I have neither cough, pain, nor fever."

"Is there no equivocation in that assertion? Is it the direct truth?"

"The direct truth."

Louis Moore looked at her earnestly.

"I can myself," he said, "trace no indications of actual disease; but why, then, are you altered?"

"*Am* I altered?"

"We will try: we will seek a proof."

"How?"

"I ask, in the first place, do you sleep as you used to?"

"I do not: but it is not because I am ill."

"Have you the appetite you once had?"

"No: but it is not because I am ill."

"You remember this little ring fastened to my watch-chain? It was my mother's, and is too small to pass the joint of my little finger. You have many a time sportively purloined it: it fitted your fore-finger. Try now."

She permitted the test: the ring dropped from the wasted little hand. Louis picked it up, and re-attached it to the chain. An uneasy flush coloured his brow. Shirley again said—"It is not because I am ill."

"Not only have you lost sleep, appetite, and flesh," proceeded Moore, "but your spirits are always at ebb: besides, there is a nervous alarm in your eye—a nervous disquiet in your manner: these peculiarities were not formerly yours."

"Mr Moore, we will pause here. You have exactly hit it: I am nervous. Now, talk of something else. What wet weather we have! Steady, pouring rain!"

"*You* nervous? Yes: and if Miss Keeldar is nervous, it is not without a cause. Let me reach it. Let me look nearer. The ailment is not physical: I have suspected that. It came in one moment. I know the day. I noticed the change. Your pain is mental."

"Not at all: it is nothing so dignified—merely nervous. Oh! dismiss the topic."

"When it is exhausted: not till then. Nervous alarms should always be communicated, that they may be dissipated. I wish I had the gift of persuasion, and could incline you to speak willingly. I believe confession, in your case, would be half equivalent to cure."

"No," said Shirley abruptly: "I wish that were at all probable: but I am afraid it is not."

She suspended her work a moment. She was now seated. Resting her elbow on the table, she leaned her head on her hand. Mr Moore looked as if he felt he had at last gained some footing in this difficult path. She was serious, and in her wish was implied an important admission; after that, she could no longer affirm that *nothing* ailed her.

The tutor allowed her some minutes for repose and reflection, ere he returned to the charge: once, his lips moved to speak; but he thought better of it, and prolonged the pause. Shirley lifted her eye to his: had he betrayed injudicious emotion, perhaps obstinate persistence in silence would have been the result; but he looked calm, strong, trustworthy.

"I had better tell *you* than my aunt," she said, "or than my cousins, or my uncle: they would all make such a bustle—and it is that very bustle I dread; the alarm, the flurry, the éclat: in short, I never liked to be the centre of a small domestic whirlpool. You can bear a little shock—eh?"

"A great one, if necessary."

Not a muscle of the man's frame moved, and yet his

large heart beat fast in his deep chest. What was she going to tell him? Was irremediable mischief done?

"Had I thought it right to go to you, I would never have made a secret of the matter one moment," she continued: "I would have told you at once, and asked advice."

"Why was it not right to come to me?"

"It might be *right*—I do not mean that; but I could not do it. I seemed to have no title to trouble you: the mishap concerned me only—I wanted to keep it to myself, and people will not let me. I tell you, I hate to be an object of worrying attention, or a theme for village gossip. Besides, it may pass away without result—God knows!"

Moore, though tortured with suspense, did not demand a quick explanation; he suffered neither gesture, glance, nor word, to betray impatience. His tranquillity tranquillised Shirley; his confidence reassured her.

"Great effects may spring from trivial causes," she remarked, as she loosened a bracelet from her wrist; then, unfastening her sleeve, and partially turning it up —"Look here, Mr Moore."

She showed a mark in her white arm; rather a deep though healed-up indentation: something between a burn and a cut.

"I would not show that to any one in Briarfield but you, because you can take it quietly."

"Certainly there is nothing in the little mark to shock: its history will explain."

"Small as it is, it has taken my sleep away, and made me nervous, thin, and foolish; because, on account, of that little mark, I am obliged to look forward to a possibility that has its terrors."

The sleeve was readjusted; the bracelet replaced.

"Do you know that you try me?" he said, smiling.

"I am a patient sort of man, but my pulse is quickening."

"Whatever happens, you will befriend me, Mr Moore. You will give me the benefit of your self-possession, and not leave me at the mercy of agitated cowards?"

"I make no promise now. Tell me the tale, and then exact what pledge you will."

"It is a very short tale. I took a walk with Isabella and Gertrude one day, about three weeks ago. They reached home before me: I stayed behind to speak to John. After leaving him, I pleased myself with lingering in the lane, where all was very still and shady: I was tired of chattering to the girls, and in no hurry to rejoin them. As I stood leaning against the gate-pillar, thinking some very happy thoughts about my future life—for that morning I imagined that events were beginning to turn as I had long wished them to turn"——

"Ah! Nunnely had been with her the evening before!" thought Moore parenthetically.

"I heard a panting sound; a dog came running up the lane. I know most of the dogs in this neighbourhood; it was Phœbe, one of Mr Sam Wynne's pointers. The poor creature ran with her head down, her tongue hanging out; she looked as if bruised and beaten all over. I called her; I meant to coax her into the house, and give her some water and dinner; I felt sure she had been ill-used: Mr Sam often flogs his pointers cruelly. She was too flurried to know me; and when I attempted to pat her head, she turned and snatched at my arm. She bit it so as to draw blood, then ran panting on. Directly after, Mr Wynne's keeper came up, carrying a gun. He asked if I had seen a dog; I told him I had seen Phœbe.

"'You had better chain up Tartar, ma'am,' he said,

'and tell your people to keep within the house; I am after Phœbe to shoot her, and the groom is gone another way. She is raging mad.'"

Mr Moore leaned back in his chair, and folded his arms across his chest; Miss Keeldar resumed her square of silk canvas, and continued the creation of a wreath of Parmese violets.

"And you told no one, sought no help, no cure: you would not come to me?"

"I got as far as the schoolroom door; there my courage failed: I preferred to cushion the matter."

"Why! What can I demand better in this world than to be of use to you?"

"I had no claim."

"Monstrous! And you did nothing?"

"Yes: I walked straight into the laundry, where they are ironing most of the week, now that I have so many guests in the house. While the maid was busy crimping or starching, I took an Italian iron from the fire, and applied the light scarlet glowing tip to my arm: I bored it well in: it cauterised the little wound. Then I went upstairs."

"I dare say you never once groaned?"

"I am sure I don't know. I was very miserable. Not firm or tranquil at all, I think: there was no calm in my mind."

"There was calm in your person. I remember listening the whole time we sat at luncheon, to hear if you moved in the room above: all was quiet."

"I was sitting at the foot of the bed, wishing Phœbe had not bitten me."

"And alone! You like solitude."

"Pardon me."

"You disdain sympathy."

"Do I, Mr Moore?"

"With your powerful mind, you must feel independent of help, of advice, of society."

"So be it—since it pleases you."

She smiled. She pursued her embroidery carefully and quickly; but her eyelash twinkled, and then it glittered, and then a drop fell.

Mr Moore leaned forward on his desk, moved his chair, altered his attitude.

"If it is not so," he asked, with a peculiar, mellow change in his voice, "how is it, then?"

"I don't know."

"You do know, but you won't speak: all must be locked up in yourself."

"Because it is not worth sharing."

"Because nobody can give the high price you require for your confidence. Nobody is rich enough to purchase it. Nobody has the honour, the intellect, the power you demand in your adviser. There is not a shoulder in England on which you would rest your hand for support—far less a bosom which you would permit to pillow your head. Of course you must live alone."

"I *can* live alone, if need be. But the question is not how to live—but how to die alone. That strikes me in a more grisly light."

"You apprehend the effects of the virus? You anticipate an indefinitely threatening, dreadful doom?"

She bowed.

"You are very nervous and womanish."

"You complimented me two minutes since on my powerful mind."

"You are very womanish. If the whole affair were coolly examined and discussed, I feel assured it would turn out that there is no danger of your dying at all."

"Amen! I am very willing to live, if it please God. I have felt life sweet."

"How can it be otherwise than sweet with your endowments and nature? Do you truly expect that you will be seized with hydrophobia, and die raving mad?"

"I *expect* it, and have *feared* it. Just now, I fear nothing."

"Nor do I, on your account. I doubt whether the smallest particle of virus mingled with your blood: and if it did, let me assure you that—young, healthy, faultlessly sound as you are—no harm will ensue. For the rest, I shall enquire whether the dog was really mad. I hold she was not mad."

"Tell nobody that she bit me."

"Why should I, when I believe the bite innocuous as a cut of this penknife? Make yourself easy: *I* am easy, though I value your life as much as I do my own chance of happiness in eternity. Look up."

"Why, Mr Moore?"

"I wish to see if you are cheered. Put your work down, raise your head."

"There"——

"Look at me. Thank you! And is the cloud broken?"

"I fear nothing."

"Is your mind restored to its own natural sunny clime?"

"I am very content: but I want your promise."

"Dictate."

"You know, in case the worst I *have* feared should happen, they will smother me. You need not smile: they will—they always do. My uncle will be full of horror, weakness, precipitation; and that is the only expedient which will suggest itself to him. Nobody in the house will be self-possessed but you: now promise to befriend me—to keep Mr Sympson away from me—not to let Henry come near, lest I should hurt him.

Mind—*mind* that you take care of yourself, too: but I shall not injure you, I know I shall not. Lock the chamber-door against the surgeons—turn them out, if they get in. Let neither the young nor the old MacTurk lay a finger on me; nor Mr Greaves, their colleague; and, lastly, if I give trouble, with your own hand administer to me a strong narcotic: such a sure dose of laudanum as shall leave no mistake. *Promise to do this.*"

Moore left his desk, and permitted himself the recreation of one or two turns through the room. Stopping behind Shirley's chair, he bent over her, and said, in a low emphatic voice—"I promise all you ask—without comment, without reservation."

"If female help is needed, call in my housekeeper, Mrs Gill: let her lay me out, if I die. She is attached to me. She wronged me again and again, and again and again I forgave her. She now loves me, and would not defraud me of a pin: confidence has made her honest; forbearance has made her kind-hearted. At this day, I can trust both her integrity, her courage, and her affection. Call her; but keep my good aunt and my timid cousins away. Once more, promise."

"I promise."

"That is good in you," she said, looking up at him as he bent over her, and smiling.

"Is it good? Does it comfort?"

"Very much."

"I will be with you—I and Mrs Gill only—in any, in every extremity where calm and fidelity are needed. No rash or coward hand shall meddle."

"Yet you think me childish?"

"I do."

"Ah! you despise me."

"Do we despise children?"

"In fact, I am neither so strong, nor have I such

pride in my strength, as people think, Mr Moore; nor am I so regardless of sympathy; but when I have any grief, I fear to impart it to those I love, lest it should pain them; and to those whom I view with indifference, I cannot condescend to complain. After all, you should not taunt me with being childish; for if you were as unhappy as I have been for the last three weeks, you too would want some friend."

"We all want a friend, do we not?"

"All of us that have anything good in our natures."

"Well, you have Caroline Helstone."

"Yes. . . . And you have Mr Hall."

"Yes. . . . Mrs Pryor is a wise, good woman: she can counsel you when you need counsel."

"For your part, you have your brother Robert."

"For any right-hand defections, there is the Rev. Matthewson Helstone, M.A., to lean upon; for any left-hand fallings off, there is Hiram Yorke, Esq. Both elders pay you homage."

"I never saw Mrs Yorke so motherly to any young man as she is to you. I don't know how you have won her heart; but she is more tender to you than she is to her own sons. You have, besides, your sister, Hortense."

"It appears we are both well provided."

"It appears so."

"How thankful we ought to be!"

"Yes."

"How contented!"

"Yes."

"For my part, I am almost contented just now, and very thankful. Gratitude is a divine emotion: it fills the heart, but not to bursting: it warms it, but not to fever. I like to taste leisurely of bliss: devoured in haste, I do not know its flavour."

Still leaning on the back of Miss Keeldar's chair,

Moore watched the rapid motion of her fingers, as the green and purple garland grew beneath them. After a prolonged pause, he again asked, "Is the shadow *quite* gone?"

"Wholly. As I *was* two hours since, and as I *am* now, are two different states of existence. I believe, Mr Moore, griefs and fears nursed in silence grow like Titan infants."

"You will cherish such feelings no more in silence?"

"Not if I dare speak."

"In using the word '*dare*,' to whom do you allude?"

"To you."

"How is it applicable to me?"

"On account of your austerity and shyness."

"Why am I austere and shy?"

"Because you are proud."

"Why am I proud?"

"I should like to know: will you be good enough to tell me?"

"Perhaps, because I am poor, for one reason; poverty and pride often go together."

"That is such a nice reason: I should be charmed to discover another that would pair with it. Mate that turtle, Mr Moore."

"Immediately. What do you think of marrying to sober Poverty many-tinted Caprice?"

"Are you capricious?"

"*You* are."

"A libel. I am steady as a rock: fixed as the Polar Star."

"I look out at some early hour of the day, and see a fine, perfect rainbow, bright with promise, gloriously spanning the beclouded welkin of life. An hour afterwards I look again—half the arch is gone, and the rest is faded. Still later, the stern sky denies that it ever wore so benign a symbol of hope."

"Well, Mr Moore, you should contend against these changeful humours: they are your besetting sin. One never knows where to have you."

"Miss Keeldar, I had once—for two years—a pupil who grew very dear to me. Henry is dear, but she was dearer. Henry never gives me trouble; she—well—she did. I think she vexed me twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four"——

"She was never with you above three hours, or at the most six at a time."

"She sometimes spilled the draught from my cup, and stole the food from my plate; and when she had kept me unfed for a day (and that did not suit me, for I am a man accustomed to take my meals with reasonable relish, and to ascribe due importance to the rational enjoyment of creature comforts)"——

"I know you do. I can tell what sort of dinners you like best—perfectly well. I know precisely the dishes you prefer"——

"She robbed these dishes of flavour, and made a fool of me besides. I like to sleep well. In my quiet days, when I was my own man, I never quarrelled with the night for being long, nor cursed my bed for its thorns. She changed all this."

"Mr Moore"——

"And having taken from me peace of mind, and ease of life, she took from me herself; quite coolly—just as if, when she was gone, the world would be all the same to me. I knew I should see her again at some time. At the end of two years, it fell out that we encountered again under her own roof, where she was mistress. How do you think she bore herself towards me, Miss Keeldar?"

"Like one who had profited well by lessons learned from yourself."

"She received me haughtily: she meted out a wide

space between us, and kept me aloof by the reserved gesture, the rare and alienated glance, the word calmly civil."

"She was an excellent pupil! Having seen you distant, she at once learned to withdraw. Pray, sir, admire in her hauteur, a careful improvement on your own coolness."

"Conscience, and honour, and the most despotic necessity, dragged me apart from her, and kept me sundered with ponderous fetters. She was free: she might have been clement."

"Never free to compromise her self-respect: to seek where she had been shunned."

"Then she was inconsistent: she tantalised as before. When I thought I had made up my mind to seeing in her only a lofty stranger, she would suddenly show me such a glimpse of loving simplicity—she would warm me with such a beam of reviving sympathy, she would gladden an hour with converse so gentle, gay, and kindly—that I could no more shut my heart on her image, than I could close that door against her presence. Explain why she distressed me so."

"She could not bear to be quite outcast; and then she would sometimes get a notion into her head, on a cold, wet day, that the schoolroom was no cheerful place, and feel it incumbent on her to go and see if you and Henry kept up a good fire; and once there she liked to stay."

"But she should not be changeful: if she came at all, she should come oftener."

"There is such a thing as intrusion."

"To-morrow, you will not be as you are to-day."

"I don't know. Will you?"

"I am not mad, most noble Berenice! We may give one day to dreaming, but the next we must awake; and I shall awake to purpose the morning you are

married to Sir Philip Nunnely. The fire shines or
and me, and shows us very clearly in the glass,
Keeldar; and I have been gazing on the pictu
the time I have been talking. Look up! W
difference between your head and mine!—I lool
for thirty!"

"You are so grave; you have such a square b
and your face is sallow. I never regard you as a y
man, nor as Robert's junior."

"Don't you? I thought not. Imagine Ro
clear-cut, handsome face looking over my sho
Does not the apparition make vividly manifes
obtuse mould of my heavy traits? There!" (he sta
"I have been expecting that wire to vibrate th
half-hour."

The dinner-bell rang, and Shirley rose.

"Mr Moore," she said, as she gathered up her
"have you heard from your brother lately? D
know what he means by staying in town so long?
he talk of returning?"

"He talks of returning; but what has caus
long absence I cannot tell. To speak the tr
thought none in Yorkshire knew better than yc
why he was reluctant to come home."

A crimson shadow passed across Miss Ke
cheek.

"Write to him and urge him to come," sh
"I know there has been no impolicy in protracti
absence thus far: it is good to let the mill stand,
trade is so bad; but he must not abandon the cou

"I am aware," said Louis, "that he had an
view with you the evening before he left, and I sa
quit Fieldhead afterwards. I read his countenan
tried to read it. He turned from me. I divine
he would be long away. Some fine, slight finger
a wondrous knack at pulverising a man's brittle

I suppose Robert put too much trust in his manly beauty and native gentlemanhood. Those are better off who, being destitute of advantage, cannot cherish delusion. But I will write, and say you advise his return."

"Do not say *I* advise his return, but that his return is advisable."

The second bell rang, and Miss Keeldar obeyed its call.

Chapter xxix.

LOUIS MOORE.

LOUIS MOORE was used to a quiet life: being a quiet man, he endured it better than most men would: having a large world of his own in his own head and heart, he tolerated confinement to a small, still corner of the real world very patiently.

How hushed is Fieldhead this evening! All but Moore—Miss Keeldar, the whole family of the Sympsons, even Henry—are gone to Nunnely. Sir Philip would have them come: he wished to make them acquainted with his mother and sisters, who are now at the Priory. Kind gentleman as the Baronet is, he asked the tutor too; but the tutor would much sooner have made an appointment with the ghost of the Earl of Huntingdon to meet him, and a shadowy ring of his merry men, under the canopy of the thickest, blackest, oldest oak in Nunnely Forest. Yes, he would rather have appointed tryst with a phantom abbess, or mist-pale nun, among the wet and weedy relics of that ruined sanctuary of theirs, mouldering in the core of the wood. Louis Moore longs to have something near him to-night: but not the boy-baronet, nor his benevolent but stern mother, nor his patrician sisters, nor one soul of the Sympsons.

This night is not calm: the equinox still struggles in its storms. The wild rains of the day are abated: the great single cloud disparts and rolls away from heaven, not passing and leaving a sea all sapphire, but tossed buoyant before a continued, long-sounding, high-rushing moonlight tempest. The Moon reigns glorious, glad of the gale; as glad as if she gave herself to his fierce caress with love. No Endymion will watch for his goddess to-night; there are no flocks out on the mountains; and it is well, for to-night she welcomes Æolus.

Moore—sitting in the schoolroom—heard the storm roar round the other gable, and along the hall-front: this end was sheltered. He wanted no shelter; he desired no subdued sounds, or screened position.

"All the parlours are empty," said he: "I am sick at heart of this cell."

He left it, and went where the casements, larger and freer than the branch-screened lattice of his own apartment, admitted unimpeded the dark-blue, the silver-fleeced, the stirring and sweeping vision of the autumn night-sky. He carried no candle: unneeded was lamp or fire: the broad and clear, though cloud-crossed and fluctuating beam of the moon shone on every floor and wall.

Moore wanders through all the rooms: he seems following a phantom from parlour to parlour. In the oak-room he stops; this is not chill, and polished, and fireless like the salon: the hearth is hot and ruddy; the cinders tinkle in the intense heat of their clear glow; near the rug is a little work-table, a desk upon it, a chair near it.

Does the vision Moore has tracked occupy that chair? You would think so, could you see him standing before it. There is as much interest now in his eye, and as much significance in his face, as if in this

household solitude he had found a living companion, and was going to speak to it.

He makes discoveries. A bag, a small satin bag, hangs on the chair-back. The desk is open, the keys are in the lock; a pretty seal, a silver pen, a crimson berry or two of ripe fruit on a green leaf, a small, clean, delicate glove—these trifles at once decorate and disarrange the stand they strew. Order forbids details in a picture: she puts them tidily away; but details give charm.

Moore spoke.

"Her mark," he said: "here she has been—careless, attractive thing!—called away in haste, doubtless, and forgetting to return and put all to rights. Why does she leave fascination in her footprints? Whence did she acquire the gift to be heedless, and never offend? There is always something to chide in her, and the reprimand never settles in displeasure on the heart; but, for her lover or her husband, when it had trickled a while in words, would naturally melt from his lips in a kiss. Better pass half-an-hour in remonstrating with her, than a day in admiring or praising any other woman alive. Am I muttering?—soliloquising? Stop that."

He did stop it. He stood thinking; and then he made an arrangement for his evening's comfort.

He dropped the curtains over the broad window and regal moon: he shut out Sovereign and Court and Starry Armies; he added fuel to the hot but fast-wasting fire; he lit a candle, of which there were a pair on the table; he placed another chair opposite that near the work-stand, and then he sat down. His next movement was to take from his pocket a small, thick book of blank paper; to produce a pencil; and to begin to write in a cramp, compact hand. Come near, by all means' reader: do not be shy: stoop over his shoulder fearlessly, and read as he scribbles.

"It is nine o'clock; the carriage will not return before eleven, I am certain. Freedom is mine till then: till then, I may occupy her room; sit opposite her chair; rest my elbow on her table; have her little mementoes about me.

"I used rather to like Solitude—to fancy her a somewhat quiet and serious, yet fair nymph; an Oread, descending to me from lone mountain-passes; something of the blue mist of hills in her array and of their chill breeze in her breath—but much, also, of their solemn beauty in her mien. I once could court her serenely, and imagine my heart easier when I held her to it—all mute, but majestic.

"Since that day I called S. to me in the schoolroom, and she came and sat so near my side; since she opened the trouble of her mind to me—asked my protection—appealed to my strength: since that hour I abhor Solitude. Cold abstraction — fleshless skeleton—daughter—mother—and mate of Death!

"It is pleasant to write about what is near and dear as the core of my heart: none can deprive me of this little book, and through this pencil, I can say to it what I will—say what I dare utter to nothing living—say what I dare not *think* aloud.

"We have scarcely encountered each other since that evening. Once, when I was alone in the drawing-room, seeking a book of Henry's, she entered, dressed for a concert at Stilbro'. Shyness—*her* shyness, not mine—drew a silver veil between us. Much cant have I heard and read about 'maiden modesty;' but, properly used, and not hackneyed, the words are good and appropriate words: as she passed to the window, after tacitly but gracefully recognising me, I could call her nothing in my own mind save 'stainless virgin:' to my perception, a delicate splendour robed her, and the modesty of girlhood was her halo. I may be the most

fatuous, as I am one of the plainest, of men; but, in truth, that shyness of hers touched me exquisitely: it flattered my finest sensations. I looked a stupid block, I dare say: I was alive with a life of Paradise, as she turned *her* glance from *my* glance, and softly averted her head to hide the suffusion of her cheek.

"I know this is the talk of a dreamer—of a rapt, romantic lunatic: I *do* dream: I *will* dream now and then; and if she has inspired romance into my prosaic composition, how can I help it?

"What a child she is sometimes! What an unsophisticated, untaught thing! I see her now, looking up into my face, and entreating me to prevent them from smothering her, and to be sure and give her a strong narcotic: I see her confessing that she was not so self-sufficing, so independent of sympathy, as people thought: I see the secret tear drop quietly from her eyelash. She said I thought her childish—and I did. She imagined I despised her.—Despised her! it was unutterably sweet to feel myself at once near her and above her: to be conscious of a natural right and power to sustain her, as a husband should sustain his wife.

"I worship her perfections; but it is her faults, or at least her foibles, that bring her near to me—that nestle her to my heart—that fold her about with my love—and that for a most selfish, but deeply-natural reason: these faults are the steps by which I mount to ascendency over her. If she rose a trimmed, artificial mound, without inequality, what vantage would she offer the foot? It is the natural hill, with its mossy breaks and hollows, whose slope invites ascent—whose summit it is pleasure to gain.

"To leave metaphor. It delights my eye to look on her: she suits me: if I were a king, and she the housemaid that swept my palace-stairs—across all that space

between us—my eye would recognise her qualities; a true pulse would beat for her in my heart, though an unspanned gulf made acquaintance impossible. If I were a gentleman, and she waited on me as a servant, I could not help liking that Shirley. Take from her her education—take her ornaments, her sumptuous dress—all extrinsic advantages—take all grace, but such as the symmetry of her form renders inevitable; present her to me at a cottage-door, in a stuff-gown: let her offer me there a draught of water, with that smile—with that warm goodwill with which she now dispenses manorial hospitality—I should like her. I should wish to stay an hour: I should linger to talk with that rustic. I should not feel as I *now* do. I should find in her nothing divine; but whenever I met the young peasant, it would be with pleasure—whenever I left her, it would be with regret.

"How culpably careless in her to leave her desk open, where I know she has money! In the lock hang the keys of all her repositories, of her very jewel-casket. There is a purse in that little satin bag: I see the tassel of silver beads hanging out. That spectacle would provoke my brother Robert: all her little failings would, I know, be a source of irritation to him; if they vex me it is a most pleasurable vexation: I delight to find her at fault, and were I always resident with her, I am aware she would be no niggard in thus ministering to my enjoyment. She would just give me something to do; to rectify: a theme for my tutor-lectures. I never lecture Henry: never feel disposed to do so: if he does wrong,—and that is very seldom, dear excellent lad!—a word suffices: often I do no more than shake my head; but the moment her 'minois mutin' meets my eye, expostulatory words crowd to my lips: from a taciturn man, I believe she would transform me into a talker. Whence comes the delight I take in that talk?

It puzzles myself sometimes; the more crâne, malin, taquin is her mood, consequently the clearer occasion she gives me for disapprobation, the more I seek her, the better I like her. She is never wilder than when equipped in her habit and hat: never less manageable than when she and Zoë come in fiery from a race with the wind on the hills: and I confess it—to this mute page I may confess it—I have waited an hour in the court, for the chance of witnessing her return, and for the dearer chance of receiving her in my arms from the saddle. I have noticed (again, it is to this page only I would make the remark) that she will never permit any man but myself to render her that assistance. I have seen her politely decline Sir Philip Nunnely's aid: she is always mighty gentle with her young baronet; mighty tender of his feelings, forsooth, and of his very thin-skinned amour-propre: I have marked her haughtily reject Sam Wynne's. Now I know—my heart knows it, for it has felt it—that she resigns herself to me unreluctantly: is she conscious how my strength rejoices to serve her? I myself am not her slave—I declare it,—but my faculties gather to her beauty, like the genii to the glisten of the Lamp. All my knowledge, all my prudence, all my calm, and all my power, stand in her presence humbly waiting a task. How glad they are when a mandate comes! What joy they take in the toils she assigns. Does she know it?

"I have called her careless: it is remarkable that her carelessness never compromises her refinement; indeed, through this very loophole of character, the reality, depth, genuineness of that refinement may be ascertained: a whole garment sometimes covers meagreness and malformation; through a rent sleeve, a fair round arm may be revealed. I have seen and handled many of her possessions, because they are frequently astray.

I never saw anything that did not proclaim the lady: nothing sordid, nothing soiled; in one sense she is as scrupulous as, in another, she is unthinking: as a peasant girl, she would go ever trim and cleanly. Look at the pure kid of this little glove,—at the fresh, unsullied satin of the bag.

"What a difference there is between S. and that pearl C. H.! Caroline, I fancy, is the soul of conscientious punctuality and nice exactitude; she would precisely suit the domestic habits of a certain fastidious kinsman of mine: so delicate, dexterous, quaint, quick, quiet; all done to a minute, all arranged to a straw-breadth: she would suit Robert; but what could *I* do with anything so nearly faultless? *She* is my equal; poor as myself; she is certainly pretty: a little Raffaelle head hers; Raffaelle in feature, quite English in expression: all insular grace and purity; but where is there anything to alter, anything to endure, anything to reprimand, to be anxious about? There she is, a lily of the valley, untinted, needing no tint. What change could improve her? What pencil dare to paint? *My* sweetheart, if I ever have one, must bear nearer affinity to the rose: a sweet, lively delight guarded with prickly peril. *My* wife, if I ever marry, must stir my great frame with a sting now and then; she must furnish use to her husband's vast mass of patience. I was not made so enduring to be mated with a lamb: I should find more congenial responsibility in the charge of a young lioness or leopardess. I like few things sweet, but what are likewise pungent; few things bright, but what are likewise hot. I like the summer-day, whose sun makes fruit blush and corn blanch. Beauty is never so beautiful as when, if I tease it, it wreathes back on me with spirit. Fascination is never so imperial as when, roused and half ireful, she threatens transformation to fierceness. I fear I

should tire of the mute, monotonous innocence of the lamb; I should erelong feel as burdensome the nestling dove which never stirred in my bosom: but my patience would exult in stilling the flutterings and training the energies of the restless merlin. In managing the wild instincts of the scarce manageable 'bête fauve,' my powers would revel.

"Oh, my pupil! Oh, Peri! too mutinous for heaven—too innocent for hell! never shall I do more than see, and worship, and wish for thee. Alas! knowing I could make thee happy, will it be my doom to see thee possessed by those who have not that power?

"However kindly the hand—if it is feeble, it cannot bend Shirley; and she must be bent: it cannot curb her; and she must be curbed.

"Beware! Sir Philip Nunnely! I never see you walking or sitting at her side, and observe her lips compressed, or her brow knit, in resolute endurance of some trait of your character which she neither admires nor likes; in determined toleration of some weakness she believes atoned for by a virtue, but which annoys her, despite that belief: I never mark the grave glow of her face, the unsmiling sparkle of her eye, the slight recoil of her whole frame when you draw a little too near, and gaze a little too expressively, and whisper a little too warmly: I never witness these things, but I think of the fable of Semele reversed.

"It is not the daughter of Cadmus I see: nor do I realise her fatal longing to look on Jove in the majesty of his godhead. It is a priest of Juno that stands before me, watching late and lone at a shrine in an Argive temple. For years of solitary ministry, he has lived on dreams: there is divine madness upon him: he loves the idol he serves, and prays day and night that his frenzy may be fed, and that the Ox-eyed may smile on

her votary. She has heard; she will be propitious. All Argos slumbers. The doors of the temple are shut: the priest waits at the altar.

"A shock of heaven and earth is felt—not by the slumbering city; only by that lonely watcher, brave and unshaken in his fanaticism. In the midst of silence, with no preluding sound, he is wrapt in sudden light. Through the roof—through the rent, wide-yawning, vast, white-blazing blue of heaven above, pours a wondrous descent—dread as the down-rushing of stars. He has what he asked: withdraw—forbear to look—I am blinded. I hear in that fane an unspeakable sound—would that I could not hear it! I see an insufferable glory burning terribly between the pillars. Gods be merciful and quench it!

"A pious Argive enters to make an early offering in the cool dawn of morning. There was thunder in the night: the bolt fell here. The shrine is shivered: the marble pavement round, split and blackened. Saturnia's statue rises chaste, grand, untouched: at her feet, piled ashes lie pale. No priest remains: he who watched will be seen no more.

. . . . . .

"There is the carriage! Let me lock up the desk and pocket the keys: she will be seeking them to-morrow: she will have to come to me. I hear her—'Mr Moore, have you seen my keys?'

"So she will say, in her clear voice, speaking with reluctance, looking ashamed, conscious that this is the twentieth time of asking. I will tantalise her: keep her with me, expecting, doubting; and when I *do* restore them, it shall not be without a lecture. Here is the bag, too, and the purse; the glove—pen—seal. She shall wring them all out of me slowly and separately: only by confession, penitence, entreaty. I never can touch her hand, or a ringlet of her head, or

a ribbon of her dress, but I will make privileges for myself: every feature of her face, her bright eyes, her lips, shall go through each change they know, for my pleasure: display each exquisite variety of glance and curve, to delight—thrill—perhaps, more hopelessly to enchain me. If I must be her slave, I will not lose my freedom for nothing."

He locked the desk, pocketed all the property, and went.

Chapter xxx.

RUSHEDGE, A CONFESSIONAL.

EVERYBODY said it was high time for Mr Moore to return home: all Briarfield wondered at his strange absence, and Whinbury and Nunnely brought each its separate contribution of amazement.

Was it known why he stayed away? Yes: it was known twenty—forty times over; there being, at least, forty plausible reasons adduced to account for the unaccountable circumstance. Business it was not—*that* the gossips agreed: he had achieved the business on which he departed long ago: his four ringleaders he had soon scented out and run down: he had attended their trial, heard their conviction and sentence, and seen them safely shipped prior to transportation.

This was known at Briarfield: the newspapers had reported it: the *Stilbro' Courier* had given every particular, with amplifications. None applauded his perseverance, or hailed his success; though the mill-owners were glad of it, trusting that the terrors of Law vindicated would henceforward paralyse the sinister valour of disaffection. Disaffection, however, was still heard muttering to himself. He swore ominous

oaths over the drugged beer of ale-houses, and drank strange toasts in fiery British gin.

One report affirmed that Moore *dared* not come to Yorkshire; he knew his life was not worth an hour's purchase, if he did.

"I'll tell him that," said Mr Yorke, when his foreman mentioned the rumour; "and if *that* does not bring him home full-gallop—nothing will."

Either that or some other motive prevailed, at last, to recall him. He announced to Joe Scott the day he should arrive at Stilbro', desiring his hackney to be sent to the "George" for his accommodation; and Joe Scott having informed Mr Yorke, that gentleman made it in his way to meet him.

It was market-day: Moore arrived in time to take his usual place at the market-dinner. As something of a stranger—and as a man of note and action—the assembled manufacturers received him with a certain distinction. Some—who in public would scarcely have dared to acknowledge his acquaintance, lest a little of the hate and vengeance laid up in store for him should perchance have fallen on them—in private hailed him as in some sort their champion. When the wine had circulated, their respect would have kindled to enthusiasm, had not Moore's unshaken nonchalance held it in a damp, low, smouldering state.

Mr Yorke—the permanent president of these dinners—witnessed his young friend's bearing with exceeding complacency. If one thing could stir his temper or excite his contempt more than another, it was to see a man befooled by flattery, or elate with popularity. If one thing smoothed, soothed, and charmed him especially, it was the spectacle of a public character incapable of relishing his publicity: *incapable*, I say; disdain would but have incensed—it was indifference that appeased his rough spirit.

Robert, leaning back in his chair, quiet and almost surly, while the clothiers and blanket-makers vaunted his prowess and rehearsed his deeds—many of them interspersing their flatteries with coarse invectives against the operative class—was a delectable sight for Mr Yorke. His heart tingled with the pleasing conviction that these gross eulogiums shamed Moore deeply, and made him half-scorn himself and his work. On abuse, on reproach, on calumny, it is easy to smile; but painful indeed is the panegyric of those we contemn. Often had Moore gazed with a brilliant countenance over howling crowds from a hostile hustings: he had breasted the storm of unpopularity with gallant bearing and soul elate; but he drooped his head under the half-bred tradesmen's praise, and shrank chagrined before their congratulations.

Yorke could not help asking him how he liked his supporters, and whether he did not think they did honour to his cause. "But it is a pity, lad," he added, "that you did not hang these four samples of the Unwashed. If you had managed *that* feat, the gentry here would have riven the horses out of the coach, yoked to a score of asses, and drawn you into Stilbro' like a conquering general."

Moore soon forsook the wine, broke from the party, and took the road. In less than five minutes Mr Yorke followed him: they rode out of Stilbro' together.

It was early to go home, but yet it was late in the day: the last ray of the sun had already faded from the cloud-edges, and the October night was casting over the moorlands the shadow of her approach.

Mr Yorke—moderately exhilarated with his moderate libations, and not displeased to see young Moore again in Yorkshire, and to have him for his comrade during the long ride home—took the discourse much to him-

self. He touched briefly, but scoffingly, on the trials and the conviction: he passed thence to the gossip of the neighbourhood, and, ere long, he attacked Moore on his own personal concerns.

"Bob, I believe you are worsted; and you deserve it. All was smooth. Fortune had fallen in love with you: she had decreed you the first prize in her wheel —twenty thousand pounds: she only required that you should hold your hand out and take it. And what did you do? You called for a horse and rode a-hunting to Warwickshire. Your sweetheart—Fortune, I mean—was perfectly indulgent. She said, 'I'll excuse him: he's young.' She waited like 'Patience on a monument,' till the chase was over, and the vermin-prey run down. She expected you would come back then, and be a good lad: you might still have had her first prize.

"It capped her beyond expression, and me too, to find that, instead of thundering home in a breakneck gallop, and laying your assize-laurels at her feet, you coolly took coach up to London. What you have done there, Satan knows: nothing in this world, I believe, but sat and sulked: your face was never lily-fair, but it is olive-green now. You're not as bonnie as you were, man."

"And who is to have this prize you talk so much about?"

"Only a baronet: that is all. I have not a doubt in my own mind you've lost her: she will be Lady Nunnely before Christmas."

"Hem! Quite probable."

"But she need not to have been. Fool of a lad! I swear you might have had her!"

"By what token, Mr Yorke?"

"By every token. By the light of her eyes, the red of her cheeks: red they grew when your name was mentioned, though of custom they are pale."

"My chance is quite over, I suppose?"

"It ought to be; but try: it is worth trying. I call this Sir Philip milk and water. And then he writes verses, they say—tags rhymes. *You* are above that, Bob, at all events."

"Would you advise me to propose, late as it is, Mr Yorke? at the eleventh hour?"

"You can but make the experiment, Robert. If she has a fancy for you—and, on my conscience, I believe she has, or had—she will forgive much. But, my lad, you are laughing: is it at me? You had better girn at your own perverseness. I see, however, you laugh at the wrong side of your mouth: you have as sour a look at this moment as one need wish to see."

"I have so quarrelled with myself, Yorke. I have so kicked against the pricks, and struggled in a strait waistcoat, and dislocated my wrists with wrenching them in handcuffs, and battered my hard head, by driving it against a harder wall."

"Ha! I'm glad to hear that. Sharp exercise yon! I hope it has done you good; ta'en some of the self-conceit out of you?"

"Self-conceit! What is it? Self-respect, self-tolerance, even, what are they? Do you sell the articles? Do you know anybody who does? Give an indication: they would find in me a liberal chapman. I would part with my last guinea this minute to buy."

"Is it so with you, Robert? I find that spicy. I like a man to speak his mind. What has gone wrong?"

"The machinery of all my nature; the whole enginery of this human mill: the boiler, which I take to be the heart, is fit to burst."

"That suld be putten i' print: it's striking. It's

almost blank verse. Ye'll be jingling into poetry just e'now. If the afflatus comes, give way, Robert; never heed me: I'll bear it this whet (time)."

"Hideous, abhorrent, base blunder! You may commit in a moment, what you may rue for years—what life cannot cancel."

"Lad, go on. I call it pie, nuts, sugar-candy. I like the taste uncommonly. Go on: it will do you good to talk: the moor is before us now, and there is no life for many a mile round."

"I *will* talk. I am not ashamed to tell. There is a sort of wild cat in my breast, and I choose that you shall hear how it can yell."

"To me it is music. What grand voices you and Louis have! When Louis sings—tones off like a soft, deep bell, I've felt myself tremble again. The night is still: it listens: it is just leaning down to you, like a black priest to a blacker penitent. Confess, lad: smooth naught down: be candid as a convicted, justified, sanctified Methody at an experience-meeting. Make yourself as wicked as Beelzebub: it will ease your mind."

"As mean as Mammon, you would say. Yorke, if I got off horseback and laid myself down across the road, would you have the goodness to gallop over me—backwards and forwards—about twenty times?"

"Wi' all the pleasure in life, if there were no such thing as a coroner's inquest."

"Hiram Yorke, I certainly believed she loved me. I have seen her eyes sparkle radiantly when she has found me out in a crowd: she has flushed up crimson when she has offered me her hand, and said, 'How do you do, Mr Moore?'

"My name had a magical influence over her: when others uttered it, she changed countenance,—I know she did. She pronounced it herself in the most musical

of her many musical tones. She was cordial to me; she took an interest in me; she was anxious about me; she wished me well; she sought, she seized every opportunity to benefit me. I considered, paused, watched, weighed, wondered: I could come to but one conclusion—this is love.

"I looked at her, Yorke: I saw, in her, youth and a species of beauty. I saw power in her. Her wealth offered me the redemption of my honour and my standing. I owed her gratitude. She had aided me substantially and effectually by a loan of five thousand pounds. Could I remember these things? Could I believe she loved me? Could I hear wisdom urge me to marry her, and disregard every dear advantage, disbelieve every flattering suggestion, disdain every well-weighed counsel, turn and leave her? Young, graceful, gracious,—my benefactress, attached to me, enamoured of me,—I used to say so to myself; dwell on the word; mouth it over and over again; swell over it with a pleasant, pompous complacency,—with an admiration dedicated entirely to myself, and unimpaired even by esteem for her; indeed, I smiled in deep secrecy at her naïveté and simplicity, in being the first to love, and to show it. That whip of yours seems to have a good heavy handle, Yorke: you can swing it about your head and knock me out of the saddle, if you choose. I should rather relish a loundering whack."

"Tak' patience, Robert, till the moon rises, and I can see you. Speak plain out,—did you love her or not? I could like to know: I feel curious."

"Sir . . . Sir—I say—she is very pretty, in her own style, and very attractive. She has a look, at times, of a thing made out of fire and air, at which I stand and marvel, without a thought of clasping and kissing it. I felt in her a powerful magnet to my interest and vanity:

I never felt as if nature meant her to be my other and better self. When a question on that head rushed upon me, I flung it off, saying brutally, I should be rich with her, and ruined without her: vowing I would be practical, and not romantic."

"A very sensible resolve. What mischief came of it, Bob?"

"With this sensible resolve, I walked up to Fieldhead one night last August: it was the very eve of my departure for Birmingham—for—you see—I wanted to secure fortune's splendid prize: I had previously despatched a note, requesting a private interview. I found her at home, and alone.

"She received me without embarrassment, for she thought I came on business: *I* was embarrassed enough, but determined. I hardly know how I got the operation over; but I went to work in a hard, firm fashion,—frightful enough, I dare say. I sternly offered myself—my fine person—with my debts, of course, as a settlement.

"It vexed me; it kindled my ire, to find that she neither blushed, trembled, nor looked down. She responded—'I doubt whether I have understood you, Mr Moore.'

"And I had to go over the whole proposal twice, and word it as plainly as A B C, before she would fully take it in. And then, what did she do? Instead of faltering a sweet Yes, or maintaining a soft, confused silence (which would have been as good) she started up, walked twice fast through the room, in the way that *she* only does, and no other woman, and ejaculated—'God bless me!'

"Yorke, I stood on the hearth, backed by the mantelpiece; against it I leaned, and prepared for anything—everything. I knew my doom, and I knew

myself. There was no misunderstanding her aspect and voice. She stopped and looked at me.

"'God bless me!' she piteously repeated, in that shocked, indignant, yet saddened accent. 'You have made a strange proposal—strange from *you*; and if you knew how strangely you worded it, and looked it, you would be startled at yourself. You spoke like a brigand who demanded my purse, rather than like a lover who asked my heart.'

"A queer sentence, was it not, Yorke? and I knew, as she uttered it, it was true as queer. Her words were a mirror in which I saw myself.

"I looked at her, dumb and wolfish: she at once enraged and shamed me.

"'Gérard Moore, you know you don't love Shirley Keeldar.' I might have broken out into false swearing: vowed that I did love her; but I could not lie in her pure face: I could not perjure myself in her truthful presence. Besides, such hollow oaths would have been vain as void: she would no more have believed me than she would have believed the ghost of Judas, had he broken from the night and stood before her. Her female heart had finer perceptions than to be cheated into mistaking my half-coarse, half-cold admiration, for true-throbbing, manly love.

"What next happened? you will say, Mr Yorke.

"Why, she sat down in the window-seat and cried. She cried passionately: her eyes not only rained, but lightened. They flashed, open, large, dark, haughty, upon me: they said—'You have pained me: you have outraged me: you have deceived me.'

"She added words soon to looks.

"'I *did* respect—I *did* admire—I *did* like you,' she said: 'yes—as much as if you were my brother: and *you—you* want to make a speculation of me. You would immolate me to that mill—your Moloch!'

"I had the common sense to abstain from any word of excuse—any attempt at palliation: I stood to be scorned.

"Sold to the devil for the time being, I was certainly infatuated: when I did speak, what do you think I said?

"'Whatever my own feelings were, I was persuaded *you* loved *me*, Miss Keeldar.'

"Beautiful!—was it not? She sat quite confounded. 'Is it Robert Moore that speaks?' I heard her mutter. 'Is it a man—or something lower?'

"'Do you mean,' she asked aloud—'do you mean you thought I loved you as we love those we wish to marry?'

"It *was* my meaning; and I said so.

"'You conceived an idea obnoxious to a woman's feelings,' was her answer: 'you have announced it in a fashion revolting to a woman's soul. You insinuate that all the frank kindness I have shown you has been a complicated, a bold, and an immodest manœuvre to ensnare a husband: you imply that at last you come here out of pity to offer me your hand, because I have courted you. Let me say this:—Your sight is jaundiced: you have seen wrong. Your mind is warped: you have judged wrong. Your tongue betrays you: you: you now speak wrong. I never loved you. Be at rest there. My heart is as pure of passion for you as yours is barren of affection for me.'

"I hope I was answered, Yorke?

"'I seem to be a blind besotted sort of person,' was my remark.

"'*Loved* you!' she cried. 'Why, I have been as frank with you as a sister—never shunned you—never feared you. You cannot,' she affirmed triumphantly—'you cannot make me tremble with your coming, nor accelerate my pulse by your influence.'

"I alleged that often, when she spoke to me, she blushed, and that the sound of my name moved her."

"'Not for *your* sake!' she declared briefly: I urged explanation, but could get none.

"'When I sat beside you at the school-feast, did you think I loved you then? When I stopped you in Maythorn Lane, did you think I loved you then? When I called on you in the counting-house—when I walked with you on the pavement—did you think I loved you then?'

"So she questioned me; and I said I did.

"By the Lord! Yorke—she rose—she grew tall—she expanded and refined almost to flame: there was a trembling all through her, as in live coal, when its vivid vermilion is hottest.

"'That is to say, that you have the worst opinion of me: that you deny me the possession of all I value most. That is to say, that I am a traitor to all my sisters: that I have acted as no woman can act, without degrading herself and her sex: that I have sought where the incorrupt of my kind naturally scorn and abhor to seek.' She and I were silent for many a minute. 'Lucifer—Star of the Morning!' she went on, 'thou art fallen. You—once high in my esteem—are hurled down: you—once intimate in my friendship—are cast out. Go!'

"I went not: I had heard her voice tremble—seen her lip quiver: I knew another storm of tears would fall; and then, I believed, some calm and some sunshine must come, and I would wait for it.

"As fast, but more quietly than before, the warm rain streamed down: there was another sound in her weeping—a softer, more regretful sound. While I watched, her eyes lifted to me a gaze more reproachful than haughty—more mournful than incensed.

"'Oh, Moore!' said she: it was worse than 'Et tu, Brute!'

"I relieved myself by what should have been a sigh,

but it became a groan. A sense of Cain-like desolation made my breast ache.

"'There has been error in what I have done,' I said, 'and it has won me bitter wages: which I will go and spend far from her who gave them.'

"I took my hat. All the time, I could not have borne to depart so; and I believed she would not let me. Nor would she, but for the mortal pang I had given her pride, that cowed her compassion and kept her silent.

"I was obliged to turn back of my own accord when I reached the door, to approach her and to say, 'Forgive me.'

"'I could, if there was not myself to forgive, too,' was her reply; 'but to mislead a sagacious man so far, I must have done wrong.'

"I broke out suddenly with some declamation I do not remember: I know that it was sincere, and that my wish and aim were to absolve her to herself: in fact, in her case, self-accusation was a chimera.

"At last, she extended her hand. For the first time I wished to take her in my arms and kiss her. I *did* kiss her hand many times.

"'Some day we shall be friends again,' she said, 'when you have had time to read my actions and motives in a true light, and not so horribly to misinterpret them. Time may give you the right key to all: then, perhaps, you will comprehend me; and then we shall be reconciled.'

"Farewell drops rolled slow down her cheeks: she wiped them away.

"'I am sorry for what has happened—deeply sorry,' she sobbed. So was I, God knows! Thus were we severed."

"A queer tale!" commented Mr Yorke.

"I'll do it no more," vowed his companion: "never more will I mention marriage to a woman, unless I feel

love. Henceforth, Credit and Commerce may take care of themselves. Bankruptcy may come when it lists. I have done with slavish fear of disaster. I mean to work diligently, wait patiently, bear steadily. Let the worst come—I will take an axe and an emigrant's berth, and go out with Louis to the West—he and I have settled it. No woman shall ever again look at me as Miss Keeldar looked—ever again feel towards me as Miss Keeldar felt: in no woman's presence will I ever again stand at once such a fool and such a knave—such a brute and such a puppy."

"Tut!" said the imperturbable Yorke, "you make too much of it; but still, I say, I am capped: firstly, that she did not love you; and, secondly, that you did not love her. You are both young; you are both handsome; you are both well enough for wit, and even for temper—take you on the right side: what ailed you, that you could not agree?"

"We never *have* been—never *could* be *at home* with each other, Yorke. Admire each other as we might at a distance, still we jarred when we came very near. I have sat at one side of a room and observed her at the other; perhaps in an excited, genial moment, when she had some of her favourites round her—her old beaux, for instance, yourself and Helstone, with whom she is so playful, pleasant, and eloquent. I have watched her when she was most natural, most lively, and most lovely; my judgment has pronounced her beautiful: beautiful she is, at times, when her mood and her array partake of the splendid. I have drawn a little nearer, feeling that our terms of acquaintance gave me the right of approach; I have joined the circle round her seat, caught her eye, and mastered her attention; then we have conversed; and others—thinking me, perhaps, peculiarly privileged—have withdrawn by degrees, and left us alone. Were we happy thus left? For myself,

I must say, No. Always a feeling of constraint came over me; always I was disposed to be stern and strange. We talked politics and business: no soft sense of domestic intimacy ever opened our hearts, or thawed our language, and made it flow easy and limpid. If we had confidences, they were confidences of the counting-house, not of the heart. Nothing in her cherished affection in me—made me better, gentler: she only stirred my brain and whetted my acuteness: she never crept into my heart or influenced its pulse; and for this good reason, no doubt, because I had not the secret of making her love me."

"Well, lad, it is a queer thing. I might laugh at thee, and reckon to despise thy refinements; but as it is dark night and we are by ourselves, I don't mind telling thee that thy talk brings back a glimpse of my own past life. Twenty-five years ago, I tried to persuade a beautiful woman to love me, and she would not. I had not the key to her nature: she was a stone wall to me, doorless and windowless."

"But you loved *her*, Yorke: you worshipped Mary Cave: your conduct, after all, was that of a man—never of a fortune-hunter."

"Ay! I *did* love her: but then she was beautiful as the moon we do *not* see to-night; there is nought like her in these days: Miss Helstone, maybe, has a look of her, but nobody else."

"Who has a look of her?"

"That black-coated tyrant's niece; that quiet, delicate Miss Helstone. Many a time I have put on my spectacles to look at the lassie in church, because she has gentle blue een, wi' long lashes; and, when she sits in shadow, and is very still and very pale, and is, happen, about to fall asleep wi' the length of the sermon and the heat of the biggin'—she is as like one of Canova's marbles as aught else."

"Was Mary Cave in that style?"

"Far grander! Less lass-like and flesh-like. You wondered why she hadn't wings and a crown. She was a stately, peaceful angel—was my Mary."

"And you could not persuade her to love you?"

"Not with all I could do; though I prayed Heaven many a time, on my bended knees, to help me."

"Mary Cave was not what you think her, Yorke—I have seen her picture at the Rectory. She is no angel, but a fair, regular-featured, taciturn-looking woman—rather too white and lifeless for my taste. But—supposing she had been something better than she was"——

"Robert," interrupted Yorke, "I could fell you off your horse at this moment. However, I'll hold my hand. Reason tells me you are right, and I am wrong. I know well enough that the passion I still have is only the remnant of an illusion. If Miss Cave had possessed either feeling or sense, she could not have been so perfectly impassible to my regard as she showed herself—she must have preferred me to that copper-faced despot."

"Supposing, Yorke, she had been educated (no women were educated in those days); supposing she had possessed a thoughtful, original mind, a love of knowledge, a wish for information, which she took an artless delight in receiving from your lips, and having measured out to her by your hand; supposing her conversation—when she sat at your side—was fertile, varied, imbued with a picturesque grace and genial interest, quiet flowing but clear and bounteous; supposing that when you stood near her by chance, or when you sat near her by design, comfort at once became your atmosphere, and content your element; supposing that whenever her face was under your gaze, or her idea filled your thoughts, you gradually ceased to be hard and anxious, and pure

affection, love of home, thirst for sweet discourse, unselfish longing to protect and cherish, replaced the sordid, cankering calculations of your trade; supposing —with all this—that many a time, when you had been so happy as to possess your Mary's little hand, you had felt it tremble as you held it—just as a warm little bird trembles when you take it from its nest; supposing you had noticed her shrink into the background on your entrance into a room, yet if you sought her in her retreat she welcomed you with the sweetest smile that ever lit a fair virgin face, and only turned her eyes from the encounter of your own, lest their clearness should reveal too much; supposing, in short, your Mary had been—not cold, but modest; not vacant, but reflective; not obtuse, but sensitive; not inane, but innocent; not prudish, but pure—would you have left her to court another woman for her wealth?"

Mr Yorke raised his hat, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"The moon is up," was his first not quite relevant remark, pointing with his whip across the moor. "There she is, rising into the haze, staring at us wi' a strange red glower. She is no more silver than old Helstone's brow is ivory. What does she mean by leaning her cheek on Rushedge i' that way, and looking at us wi' a scowl and a menace?"

"Yorke, if Mary had loved you silently, yet faithfully—chastely, yet fervently—as you would wish your wife to love, would you have left her?"

"Robert!" he lifted his arm: he held it suspended, and paused. "Robert! this is a queer world, and men are made of the queerest dregs that Chaos churned up in her ferment. I might swear sounding oaths—oaths that would make the poachers think there was a bittern booming in Bilberry Moss—that, in the case you put, Death only should have parted me from Mary. But I

have lived in the world fifty-five years; I have been forced to study human nature; and—to speak a dark truth—the odds are, if Mary had loved and not scorned me; if I had been secure of her affection, certain of her constancy, been irritated by no doubts, stung by no humiliations—the odds are" (he let his hand fall heavy on the saddle)—"the odds are, I should have left her!"

They rode side by side in silence. Ere either spoke again, they were on the other side of Rushedge: Briarfield lights starred the purple skirt of the moor. Robert, being the youngest, and having less of the past to absorb him than his comrade, recommenced first.

"I believe—I daily find it proved—that we can get nothing in this world worth keeping, not so much as a principle or a conviction, except out of purifying flame, or through strengthening peril. We err; we fall; we are humbled—then we walk more carefully. We greedily eat and drink poison out of the gilded cup of vice, or from the beggar's wallet of avarice; we are sickened, degraded; everything good in us rebels against us; our souls rise bitterly indignant against our bodies; there is a period of civil war; if the soul has strength, it conquers and rules thereafter."

"What art thou going to do, Robert? What are thy plans?"

"For my private plans, I'll keep them to myself; which is very easy, as at present I have none: no private life is permitted a man in my position, a man in debt. For my public plans, my views are a little altered. While I was in Birmingham, I looked a little into reality, considered closely, and at their source, the causes of the present troubles of this country; I did the same in London. Unknown, I could go where I pleased, mix with whom I would. I went where there was want of food, of fuel, of clothing; where there

was no occupation and no hope. I saw some, with naturally elevated tendencies and good feelings, kept down amongst sordid privations and harassing griefs. I saw many originally low, and to whom lack of education left scarcely anything but animal wants, disappointed in those wants, ahungered, athirst, and desperate as famished animals: I saw what taught my brain a new lesson, and filled my breast with fresh feelings. I have no intention to profess more softness or sentiment than I have hitherto professed; mutiny and ambition I regard as I have always regarded them: I should resist a riotous mob just as heretofore; I should open on the scent of a runaway ringleader as eagerly as ever, and run him down as relentlessly, and follow him up to condign punishment as rigorously; but I should do it now chiefly for the sake and the security of those he misled. Something there is to look to, Yorke, beyond a man's personal interest: beyond the advancement of well-laid schemes; beyond even the discharge of dishonouring debts. To respect himself, a man must believe he renders justice to his fellow-men. Unless I am more considerate to ignorance, more forbearing to suffering, than I have hitherto been, I shall scorn myself as grossly unjust. What now?" he said, addressing his horse, which, hearing the ripple of water, and feeling thirsty, turned to a wayside trough, where the moonbeam was playing in a crystal eddy.

"Yorke," pursued Moore, "ride on: I must let him drink."

Yorke accordingly rode slowly forwards, occupying himself as he advanced, in discriminating, amongst the many lights now spangling the distance, those of Briarmains. Stilbro' Moor was left behind; plantations rose dusk on either hand; they were descending the hill; below them lay the valley with its populous parish: they felt already at home.

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Attempted assassination of Moore.

Surrounded no longer by heath, it was not startling to Mr Yorke to see a hat rise, and to hear a voice speak behind the wall. The words, however, were peculiar.

"When the wicked perisheth, there is shouting," it said; and added, "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more" (with a deeper growl); "terrors take hold of him as waters; hell is naked before him. He shall die without knowledge."

A fierce flash and sharp crack violated the calm of night. Yorke, ere he turned, knew the four convicts of Birmingham were avenged.

Chapter xxxi.

UNCLE AND NIECE.

THE die was cast. Sir Philip Nunnely knew it: Shirley knew it: Mr Sympson knew it. That evening, when all the Fieldhead family dined at Nunnely Priory, decided the business.

Two or three things conduced to bring the Baronet to a point. He had observed that Miss Keeldar looked pensive and delicate. This new phase in her demeanour smote him on his weak or poetic side: a spontaneous sonnet brewed in his brain; and while it was still working there, one of his sisters persuaded his lady-love to sit down to the piano and sing a ballad—one of Sir Philip's own ballads. It was the least elaborate, the least affected—out of all comparison the best of his numerous efforts.

It chanced that Shirley, the moment before, had been gazing from a window down on the park; she had seen that stormy moonlight which "le Professeur Louis" was perhaps at the same instant contemplating

from her own oak-parlour lattice; she had seen the isolated trees of the domain—broad, strong, spreading oaks, and high-towering heroic beeches—wrestling with the gale. Her ear had caught the full roar of the forest lower down; the swift rushing of clouds, the moon, to the eye, hasting swifter still, had crossed her vision: she turned from sight and sound—touched, if not rapt,—wakened, if not inspired.

She sang, as requested. There was much about love in the ballad: faithful love that refused to abandon its object; love that disaster could not shake; love that, in calamity, waxed fonder, in poverty clung closer. The words were set to a fine old air—in themselves they were simple and sweet: perhaps, when read, they wanted force; when *well* sung, they wanted nothing. Shirley sang them well: she breathed into the feeling, softness; she poured round the passion, force: her voice was fine that evening; its expression dramatic: she impressed all, and charmed one.

On leaving the instrument, she went to the fire, and sat down on a seat—semi-stool, semi-cushion: the ladies were round her—none of them spoke. The Misses Sympson and the Misses Nunnely looked upon her, as quiet poultry might look on an egret, an ibis, or any other strange fowl. What made her sing so? *They* never sang so. Was it proper to sing with such expression, with such originality—so unlike a school-girl? Decidedly not: it was strange, it was unusual. What was *strange* must be *wrong*; what was *unusual* must be *improper*. Shirley was judged.

Moreover, old Lady Nunnely eyed her stonily from her great chair by the fireside: her gaze said—"This woman is not of mine or my daughters' kind: I object to her as my son's wife."

Her son catching the look, read its meaning: he

grew alarmed: what he so wished to win, there was danger he might lose. He must make haste.

The room they were in had once been a picture-gallery. Sir Philip's father—Sir Monckton—had converted it into a saloon; but still it had a shadowy, long-withdrawing look. A deep recess with a window—a recess that held one couch, one table, and a fairy cabinet, formed a room within a room. Two persons standing there might interchange a dialogue, and, so it were neither long nor loud, none be the wiser.

Sir Philip induced two of his sisters to perpetrate a duet; he gave occupation to the Misses Sympson: the elder ladies were conversing together. He was pleased to remark that, meantime, Shirley rose to look at the pictures. He had a tale to tell about one ancestress, whose dark beauty seemed as that of a flower of the south: he joined her, and began to tell it.

There were mementos of the same lady in the cabinet adorning the recess; and while Shirley was stooping to examine the missal and the rosary on the inlaid shelf, and while the Misses Nunnely indulged in a prolonged screech, guiltless of expression, pure of originality, perfectly conventional and absolutely unmeaning, Sir Philip stooped too, and whispered a few hurried sentences. At first, Miss Keeldar was struck so still, you might have fancied that whisper a charm which had changed her to a statue; but she presently looked up and answered. They parted. Miss Keeldar returned to the fire, and resumed her seat: the Baronet gazed after her, then went and stood behind his sisters. Mr Sympson—Mr Sympson only—had marked the pantomime.

That gentleman drew his own conclusions. Had he been as acute as he was meddling, as profound as he was prying, he might have found that in Sir Philip's face

whereby to correct his inference. Ever shallow, hasty, and positive, he went home quite cock-a-hoop.

He was not a man that kept secrets well: when elate on a subject, he could not avoid talking about it. The next morning, having occasion to employ his son's tutor as his secretary, he must needs announce to him, in mouthing accents, and with much flimsy pomp of manner, that he had better hold himself prepared for a return to the south, at an early day, as the important business which had detained him (Mr Sympson) so long in Yorkshire, was now on the eve of fortunate completion: his anxious and laborious efforts were likely, at last, to be crowned with the happiest success: a truly eligible addition was about to be made to the family connections.

"In Sir Philip Nunnely?" Louis Moore conjectured.

Whereupon Mr Sympson treated himself simultaneously to a pinch of snuff and a chuckling laugh, checked only by a sudden choke of dignity, and an order to the tutor to proceed with business.

For a day or two, Mr Sympsom continued as bland as oil, but also he seemed to sit on pins, and his gait, when he walked, emulated that of a hen treading a hot girdle. He was for ever looking out of the window, and listening for chariot-wheels: Bluebeard's wife—Sisera's mother—were nothing to him. He waited when the matter should be opened in form; when himself should be consulted; when lawyers should be summoned; when settlement discussions, and all the delicious worldly fuss, should pompously begin.

At last there came a letter: he himself handed it to Miss Keeldar out of the bag: he knew the handwriting; he knew the crest on the seal. He did not see it opened and read, for Shirley took it to her own room; nor did he see it answered, for she wrote her

reply shut up, and was very long about it,—the best part of a day. He questioned her whether it was answered; she responded, "Yes."

Again he waited—waited in silence—absolutely not daring to speak: kept mute by something in Shirley's face,—a very awful something—inscrutable to him as the writing on the wall to Belshazzar. He was moved more than once to call Daniel, in the person of Louis Moore, and to ask an interpretation: but his dignity forbade the familiarity. Daniel himself, perhaps, had his own private difficulties connected with that baffling bit of translation: he looked like a student for whom grammars are blank, and dictionaries dumb.

Mr Sympson had been out, to while away an anxious hour in the society of his friends at De Walden Hall. He returned a little sooner than was expected; his family and Miss Keeldar were assembled in the oak-parlour; addressing the latter, he requested her to step with him into another room: he wished to have with her a "*strictly* private interview."

She rose, asking no questions, and professing no surprise.

"Very well, sir," she said in the tone of a determined person, who is informed that the dentist is come to extract that large double tooth of his, from which he has suffered such a purgatory this month past. She left her sewing and her thimble in the window-seat, and followed her uncle where he led.

Shut into the drawing-room, the pair took seats, each in an arm-chair, placed opposite, a few yards between them.

"I have been to De Walden Hall," said Mr Sympson. He paused. Miss Keeldar's eyes were on the pretty white and green carpet. *That* information required no response: she gave none.

"I have learned," he went on slowly,—"I have learned a circumstance which surprises me."

Resting her cheek on her forefinger, she waited to be told *what* circumstance.

"It seems that Nunnely Priory is shut up; that the family are gone back to their place in ——shire. It seems that the baronet—that the baronet—that Sir Philip himself has accompanied his mother and sisters."

"Indeed!" said Shirley.

"May I ask if you share the amazement with which I received this news?"

"No, sir."

"*Is* it news to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I mean—I mean"—pursued Mr Sympson, now fidgeting in his chair, quitting his hitherto brief and tolerably clear phraseology, and returning to his customary wordy, confused, irritable style; "I mean to have a *thorough* explanation. I will *not* be put off. I—I—shall *insist* on being heard; and on—on having my own way. My questions *must* be answered. I will have clear, satisfactory replies. I am not to be trifled with. (Silence.)

"It is a strange and an extraordinary thing—a very singular—a most odd thing! I thought all was right: knew no other: and there—the family are gone!"

"I suppose, sir, they had a right to go."

"*Sir Philip is gone!*" (with emphasis).

Shirley raised her brows: "Bon voyage!" said she.

"This will not do: this must be altered, ma'am."

He drew his chair forward; he pushed it back; he looked perfectly incensed, and perfectly helpless.

"Come, come, now, uncle," expostulated Shirley, "do not begin to fret and fume, or we shall make no sense of the business. Ask me what you want to know:

I am as willing to come to an explanation as you: I promise you truthful replies."

"I want—I demand to know, Miss Keeldar, whether Sir Philip has made you an offer?"

"He has."

"You avow it?"

"I avow it. But now, go on: consider that point settled."

"He made you an offer that night we dined at the Priory?"

"It is enough to say that he made it. Go on."

"He proposed in the recess—in the room that used to be a picture gallery—that Sir Monckton converted into a saloon?"

No answer.

"You were both examining a cabinet: I saw it all: my sagacity was not at fault—it never is. Subsequently, you received a letter from him. On what subject—of what nature were the contents?"

"No matter."

"Ma'am, is that the way in which you speak to me?"

Shirley's foot tapped quick on the carpet.

"There you sit, silent and sullen—*you* who promised truthful replies!"

"Sir, I have answered you thus far: proceed."

"I should like to see that letter."

"You *cannot* see it."

"I *must* and *shall*, ma'am. I am your guardian."

"Having ceased to be a ward, I have no guardian."

"Ungrateful being! Reared by me as my own daughter"—

"Once more, uncle, have the kindness to keep to the point. Let us both remain cool. For my part, I do not wish to get into a passion; but, you know, once drive me beyond certain bounds, I care little what I say: I am not then soon checked. Listen! You

have asked me whether Sir Philip made me an offer: that question is answered. What do you wish to know next?"

"I desire to know whether you accepted or refused him? and know it I will."

"Certainly: you ought to know it. I refused him."

"Refused him! You—*you*, Shirley Keeldar, *refused* Sir Philip Nunnely?"

"I did."

The poor gentleman bounced from his chair, and first rushed, and then trotted, through the room.

"There it is! There it is! There it is!"

"Sincerely speaking, I am sorry, uncle, you are so disappointed."

Concession—contrition, never do any good with some people. Instead of softening and conciliating, they but embolden and harden them: of that number was Mr Sympson.

"*I* disappointed? What is it to me? Have *I* an interest in it? You would insinuate, perhaps, that I have motives?"

"Most people have motives, of some sort, for their actions."

"She accuses me to my face! I—that have been a parent to her—she charges with bad motives!"

"*Bad* motives, I did not say."

"And now you prevaricate. You have no principles!"

"Uncle, you tire me: I want to go away."

"Go you shall not! I will be answered. What are your intentions, Miss Keeldar?"

"In what respect?"

"In respect of matrimony."

"To be quiet—and to do just as I please."

"Just as you please! The words are to the last degree indecorous."

"Mr Sympson, I advise you not to become insulting: you know I will not bear that."

"You read French. Your mind is poisoned with French novels. You have imbibed French principles."

"The ground you are treading now returns a mighty hollow sound under your feet. Beware!"

"It will end in infamy, sooner or later: I have foreseen it all along."

"Do you assert, sir, that something in which *I* am concerned will end in infamy?"

"That it will—that it will. You said just now you would act as you please. You acknowledge no rules—no limitations."

"Silly stuff! and vulgar as silly!"

"Regardless of decorum, you are prepared to fly in the face of propriety."

"You tire me, uncle."

"What, madam—*what* could be your reasons for refusing Sir Philip?"

"At last, there is another sensible question: I shall be glad to reply to it. Sir Philip is too young for me: I regard him as a boy: all his relations—his mother especially—would be annoyed if he married me: such a step would embroil him with them: I am not his equal in the world's estimation."

"Is that all?"

"Our dispositions are not compatible."

"Why, a more amiable gentleman never breathed."

"He is very amiable—very excellent—truly estimable, but *not my master;* not in one point. I could not trust myself with his happiness: I would not undertake the keeping of it for thousands: I will accept no hand which cannot hold me in check."

"I thought you liked to do as you please: you are vastly inconsistent."

"When I promise to obey, it shall be under the con-

viction that I can keep that promise: I could not obey a youth like Sir Philip. Besides, he would never command me: he would expect me always to rule—to guide, and I have no taste whatever for the office."

"*You* no taste for swaggering, and subduing, and ordering, and ruling?"

"Not my husband: only my uncle."

"Where is the difference?"

"There *is* a slight difference: that is certain. And I know full well, any man who wishes to live in decent comfort with me as a husband must be able to control me."

"I wish you had a real tyrant."

"A tyrant would not hold me for a day—not for an hour. I would rebel—break from him—defy him."

"Are you not enough to bewilder one's brain with your self-contradiction?"

"It is evident I bewilder your brain."

"You talk of Sir Philip being young: he is two-and-twenty."

"My husband must be thirty, with the sense of forty."

"You had better pick out some old man—some whiteheaded or bald-headed swain."

"No, thank you."

"You could lead some doting fool: you might pin him to your apron."

"I might do that with a boy: but it is not my vocation. Did I not say I prefer a *master?* One in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good. One whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge. A man whose approbation can reward—whose displeasure punish me. A man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear."

"What is there to hinder you from doing all this

with Sir Philip? He is a baronet; a man of rank, property, connections, far above yours. If you talk of intellect, he is a poet: he writes verses: which you, I take it, cannot do, with all your cleverness."

"Neither his title, wealth, pedigree, nor poetry, avail to invest him with the power I describe. These are featherweights: they want ballast: a measure of sound, solid practical sense would have stood him in better stead with me."

"You and Henry rave about poetry! you used to catch fire like tinder on the subject when you were a girl."

"Oh! uncle, there is nothing really valuable in this world, there is nothing glorious in the world to come, that is not poetry!"

"Marry a poet, then, in God's name!"

"Show him me, and I will."

"Sir Philip."

"Not at all. You are almost as good a poet as he."

"Madam, you are wandering from the point."

"Indeed, uncle, I wanted to do so; and I shall be glad to lead you away with me. Do not let us get out of temper with each other: it is not worth while."

"Out of temper, Miss Keeldar! I should be glad to know who is out of temper?"

"*I* am not, yet."

"If you mean to insinuate that *I* am, I consider that you are guilty of impertinence."

"You will be soon, if you go on at that rate."

"There it is! With your pert tongue, you would try the patience of a Job."

"I know I should."

"No levity, miss! This is not a laughing matter. It is an affair I am resolved to probe thoroughly, convinced that there is mischief at the bottom. You described just now, with far too much freedom for your

years and sex, the sort of individual you would prefer as a husband.—Pray, did you paint from the life?"

Shirley opened her lips; but instead of speaking she only glowed rose-red.

"I shall have an answer to that question," affirmed Mr Sympson, assuming vast courage and consequence on the strength of this symptom of confusion.

"It was an historical picture, uncle, from several originals."

"Several originals! Bless my heart!"

"I have been in love several times."

"This is cynical."

"With heroes of many nations."

"What next"——

"And philosophers."

"She is mad"——

"Don't ring the bell, uncle; you will alarm my aunt."

"Your poor dear aunt, what a niece has she!"

"Once I loved Socrates."

"Pooh! No trifling, ma'am."

"I admired Themistocles, Leonidas, Epaminondas."

"Miss Keeldar"——

"To pass over a few centuries, Washington was a plain man, but I liked him: but, to speak of the actual present"——

"Ah! the actual present."

"To quit crude school-girl fancies, and come to realities."

"Realities! That is the test to which you shall be brought, ma'am."

"To avow before what altar I now kneel—to reveal the present idol of my soul"——

"You will make haste about it, if you please; it is near luncheon time, and confess *you shall*."

"Confess, I must: my heart is full of the secret; it

must be spoken: I only wish you were Mr Helstone instead of Mr Sympson, you would sympathise with me better."

"Madam—it is a question of common sense and common prudence, not of sympathy and sentiment, and so on. Did you say it was Mr Helstone?"

"Not precisely, but as near as may be: they are rather alike."

"I will know the name—I will have particulars."

"They positively *are* rather alike; their very faces are not dissimilar—a pair of human falcons—and dry, direct, decided both. But my hero is the mightier of the two: his mind has the clearness of the deep sea, the patience of its rocks, the force of its billows."

"Rant and fustian!"

"I daresay he can be harsh as a saw-edge, and gruff as a hungry raven."

"Miss Keeldar, does the person reside in Briarfield? answer me that."

"Uncle—I am going to tell you—his name is trembling on my tongue."

"Speak, girl!"

"That was well said, uncle. 'Speak, girl!' it is quite tragic. England has howled savagely against this man, uncle; and she will one day roar exultingly over him. He has been unscared by the howl, and he will be unelated by the shout."

"I said she was mad—she is."

"This country will change and change again in her demeanour to him: he will never change in his duty to her. Come, cease to chafe, uncle, I'll tell you his name."

"You shall tell me, or"——

"Listen! Arthur Wellesley, Lord Wellington."

Mr Sympson rose up furious: he bounced out of the

room, but immediately bounced back again, shut the door, and resumed his seat.

"Ma'am, you *shall* tell me *this*: will your principles permit you to marry a man without money—a man below you?"

"Never a man below me."

(In a high voice.) "Will you, Miss Keeldar, marry a poor man?"

"What right have you, Mr Sympson, to ask me?"

"I insist upon knowing."

"You don't go the way to know."

"My family respectability shall not be compromised."

"A good resolution: keep it."

"Madam, it is you who shall keep it."

"Impossible, sir, since I form no part of your family."

"Do you disown us?"

"I disdain your dictatorship."

"Whom *will* you marry, Miss Keeldar?"

"Not Mr Sam Wynne, because I scorn him: not Sir Philip Nunnely, because I *only* esteem him."

"Whom have you in your eye?"

"Four rejected candidates."

"Such obstinacy could not be, unless you were under improper influence."

"What do you mean? There are certain phrases potent to make my blood boil—improper influence! What old woman's cackle is that?"

"Are you a young lady?"

"I am a thousand times better: I am an honest woman, and as such I will be treated."

"Do you know" (leaning mysteriously forward, and speaking with ghastly solemnity), "do you know the whole neighbourhood teems with rumours respecting you and a bankrupt tenant of yours—the foreigner Moore?"

"Does it?"

"It does. Your name is in every mouth."

"It honours the lips it crosses, and I wish to the gods it may purify them."

"Is it *that* person who has power to influence you?"

"Beyond any whose cause you have advocated."

"Is it he you will marry?"

"He is handsome, and manly, and commanding."

"You declare it to my face! The Flemish knave! The low trader!"

"He is talented, and venturous, and resolute. Prince is on his brow, and ruler in his bearing."

"She glories in it! She conceals nothing! No shame, no fear!"

"When we speak the name of Moore, shame should be forgotten and fear discarded: the Moores know only honour and courage."

"I say she is mad."

"You have taunted me till my blood is up. You have worried me till I turn again."

"That Moore is the brother of my son's tutor. Would you let the Usher call you Sister?"

Bright and broad shone Shirley's eye, as she fixed it on her questioner now.

"No: no. Not for a province of possession—not for a century of life."

"You cannot separate the husband from his family."

"What then?"

"Mr Louis Moore's sister you will be."

"Mr Sympson . . . I am sick at heart with all this weak trash: I will bear no more. Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your aims are not my aims, your gods are not my gods. We do not view things in the same light; we do not measure them by the same standard; we hardly speak in the same tongue. Let us part.

"It is not," she resumed, much excited—"It is not that I hate you; you are a good sort of man: perhaps you mean well in your way; but we cannot suit: we are ever at variance. You annoy me with small meddling, with petty tyranny; you exasperate my temper, and make and keep me passionate. As to your small maxims, your narrow rules, your little prejudices, aversions, dogmas, bundle them off: Mr Sympson—go, offer them a sacrifice to the deity you worship; I'll none of them: I wash my hands of the lot. I walk by another creed, light, faith, and hope than you."

"Another creed! I believe she is an infidel."

"An infidel to *your* religion; an atheist to *your* god."

"*An—atheist!!!*"

"Your god, sir, is the World. In my eyes, you too, if not an infidel, are an idolater. I conceive that you ignorantly worship: in all things you appear to me too superstitious. Sir, your god, your great Bel, your fish-tailed Dagon, rises before me as a demon. You, and such as you, have raised him to a throne, put on him a crown, given him a sceptre. Behold how hideously he governs! See him busied at the work he likes best—making marriages. He binds the young to the old, the strong to the imbecile. He stretches out the arm of Mezentius and fetters the dead to the living. In his realm there is hatred—secret hatred: there is disgust—unspoken disgust: there is treachery—family treachery: there is vice—deep, deadly, domestic vice. In his dominions, children grow unloving between parents who have never loved: infants are nursed on deception from their very birth; they are reared in an atmosphere corrupt with lies. Your god rules at the bridal of kings—look at your royal dynasties! your deity is the deity of foreign aristocracies—analyse the blue blood of Spain! Your god is the Hymen of

France—what is French domestic life? All that surrounds him hastens to decay: all declines and degenerates under his sceptre. *Your* god is a masked Death."

"This language is terrible! My daughters and you must associate no longer, Miss Keeldar: there is danger in such companionship. Had I known you a little earlier—but, extraordinary as I thought you, I could not have believed"——

"Now, sir, do you begin to be aware that it is useless to scheme for me? That, in doing so, you but sow the wind to reap the whirlwind? I sweep your cobweb projects from my path, that I may pass on unsullied. I am anchored on a resolve you cannot shake. My heart, my conscience shall dispose of my hand—*they only*. Know this at last."

Mr Sympson was becoming a little bewildered.

"Never heard such language!" he muttered again and again. "Never was so addressed in my life—never was so used."

"You are quite confused, sir. You had better withdraw, or I will."

He rose hastily.

"We must leave this place: they must pack up at once."

"Do not hurry my aunt and cousins: give them time."

"No more intercourse: she's not proper."

He made his way to the door; he came back for his handkerchief; he dropped his snuff-box; leaving the contents scattered on the carpet, he stumbled out; Tartar lay outside across the mat—Mr Sympson almost fell over him: in the climax of his exasperation he hurled an oath at the dog, and a coarse epithet at his mistress.

"Poor Mr Sympson! He is both feeble and

vulgar," said Shirley to herself. "My head aches, and I am tired," she added; and leaning her head upon a cushion, she softly subsided from excitement to repose. One, entering the room a quarter of an hour afterwards, found her asleep. When Shirley had been agitated, she generally took this natural refreshment: it would come at her call.

The intruder paused in her unconscious presence, and said—"Miss Keeldar."

Perhaps his voice harmonised with some dream into which she was passing—it did not startle, it hardly roused her, without opening her eyes, she but turned her head a little, so that her cheek and profile, before hidden by her arm, became visible: she looked rosy, happy, half-smiling, but her eyelashes were wet: she had wept in slumber; or perhaps, before dropping asleep, a few natural tears had fallen after she had heard that epithet; no man—no woman is always strong, always able to bear up against the unjust opinion—the vilifying word: calumny, even from the mouth of a fool, will sometimes cut into unguarded feelings. Shirley looked like a child that had been naughty and punished, but was now forgiven and at rest.

"Miss Keeldar," again said the voice: this time it woke her; she looked up and saw at her side Louis Moore—not close at her side, but standing, with arrested step, two or three yards from her.

"Oh, Mr Moore!" she said; "I was afraid it was my uncle again: he and I have quarrelled."

"Mr Sympson should let you alone," was the reply: "can he not see that you are as yet far from strong?"

"I assure you he did not find me weak: I did not cry when he was here."

"He is about to evacuate Fieldhead—so he says. He is now giving orders to his family: he has been in the schoolroom issuing commands in a manner which,

I suppose, was a continuation of that with which he has harassed you."

"Are you and Henry to go?"

"I believe, as far as Henry is concerned, that was the tenor of his scarcely-intelligible directions; but he may change all to-morrow: he is just in that mood when you cannot depend on his consistency for two consecutive hours: I doubt whether he will leave you for weeks yet. To myself he addressed some words which will require a little attention and comment by-and-by, when I have time to bestow on them. At the moment he came in, I was busied with a note I had got from Mr Yorke—so fully busied that I cut short the interview with him somewhat abruptly: I left him raving: here is the note—I wish you to see it—it refers to my brother Robert." And he looked at Shirley.

"I shall be glad to hear news of him: is he coming home?"

"He is come: he is in Yorkshire: Mr Yorke went yesterday to Stilbro' to meet him."

"Mr Moore—something is wrong"——

"Did my voice tremble? He is now at Briarmains—and I am going to see him."

"What has occurred?"

"If you turn so pale I shall be sorry I have spoken. It might have been worse: Robert is not dead, but much hurt."

"Oh! sir; it is you who are pale. Sit down near me."

"Read the note—let me open it."

Miss Keeldar read the note: it briefly signified that last night Robert Moore had been shot at from behind the wall of Milldean plantation, at the foot of the Brow; that he was wounded severely, but it was hoped not fatally: of the assassin, or assassins, nothing was known

—they had escaped. "No doubt," Mr Yorke observed, "it was done in revenge: it was a pity ill-will had ever been raised; but that could not be helped now."

"He is my only brother," said Louis, as Shirley returned the note. "I cannot hear unmoved that ruffians have laid in wait for him, and shot him down like some wild beast from behind a wall."

"Be comforted: be hopeful. He will get better—I know he will."

Shirley, solicitous to soothe, held her hand over Mr Moore's, as it lay on the arm of the chair: she just touched it lightly, scarce palpably.

"Well, give me your hand," he said; "it will be for the first time: it is in a moment of calamity—give it me."

Awaiting neither consent nor refusal, he took what he asked.

"I am going to Briarmains now," he went on. "I want you to step over to the Rectory, and tell Caroline Helstone what has happened: will you do this? she will hear it best from you."

"Immediately," said Shirley, with docile promptitude. "Ought I to say that there is no danger?"

"Say so."

"You will come back soon, and let me know more?"

"I will either come or write."

"Trust me for watching over Caroline. I will communicate with your sister, too; but, doubtless, she it already with Robert?"

"Doubtless; or will be soon. Good morning, now."

"You will bear up, come what may?"

"We shall see that."

Shirley's fingers were obliged to withdraw from the tutor's: Louis was obliged to relinquish that hand folded, clasped, hidden in his own.

"I thought I should have had to support her," he said, as he walked towards Briarmains, "and it is she who has made me strong. That look of pity—that gentle touch! No down was ever softer—no elixir more potent! It lay like a snowflake: it thrilled like lightning. A thousand times I have longed to possess that hand—to have it in mine. I *have* possessed it—for five minutes I held it. Her fingers and mine can never be strangers more—having met once, they must meet again."

Chapter xxxij.

THE SCHOOLBOY AND THE WOOD-NYMPH.

BRIARMAINS being nearer than the Hollow, Mr Yorke had conveyed his young comrade there. He had seen him laid in the best bed of the house, as carefully as if he had been one of his own sons. The sight of his blood, welling from the treacherously-inflicted wound, made him indeed the son of the Yorkshire gentleman's heart. The spectacle of the sudden event: of the tall, straight shape prostrated in its pride across the road: of the fine southern head laid low in the dust; of that youth in prime flung at once before him pallid, lifeless, helpless—this was the very combination of circumstances to win for the victim Mr Yorke's liveliest interest.

No other hand was there to raise—to aid; no other voice to question kindly; no other brain to concert measures: he had to do it all himself. This utter dependence of the speechless, bleeding youth (as a youth he regarded him) on his benevolence, secured that benevolence most effectually. Well did Mr Yorke like to have power, and to use it: he had now between his

hands power over a fellow-creature's life: it suited him.

No less perfectly did it suit his saturnine better-half: the incident was quite in her way, and to her taste. Some women would have been terror-struck to see a gory man brought in over their threshold, and laid down in their hall in the "howe of the night." There, you would suppose, was subject-matter for hysterics. No: Mrs Yorke went into hysterics when Jessy would not leave the garden to come to her knitting, or when Martin proposed starting for Australia, with a view to realise freedom, and escape the tyranny of Matthew; but an attempted murder near her door—a half-murdered man in her best bed—set her straight, cheered her spirits, gave her cap the dash of a turban.

Mrs Yorke was just the woman who, while rendering miserable the drudging life of a simple maid-servant, would nurse like a heroine an hospital full of plague patients. She almost loved Moore: her tough heart almost yearned towards him, when she found him committed to her charge,—left in her arms, as dependent on her as her youngest-born in the cradle. Had she seen a domestic, or one of her daughters, give him a draught of water, or smooth his pillow, she would have boxed the intruder's ears. She chased Jessy and Rose from the upper realm of the house: she forbade the housemaids to set their foot in it.

Now, if the accident had happened at the Rectory gates, and old Helstone had taken in the martyr, neither Yorke nor his wife would have pitied him: they would have adjudged him right served for his tyranny and meddling: as it was, he became, for the present, the apple of their eye.

Strange! Louis Moore was permitted to come,—to sit down on the edge of the bed, and lean over the pillow,—to hold his brother's hand, and press his pale

forehead with his fraternal lips; and Mrs Yorke bore it well. She suffered him to stay half the day there; she once suffered him to sit up all night in the chamber; she rose herself at five o'clock of a wet November morning, and with her own hands lit the kitchen fire, and made the brothers a breakfast, and served it to them herself. Majestically arrayed in a boundless flannel wrapper, a shawl, and her nightcap, she sat and watched them eat, as complacently as a hen beholds her chickens feed. Yet she gave the cook warning that day for venturing to make and carry up to Mr Moore a basin of sago-gruel; and the housemaid lost her favour because, when Mr Louis was departing, she brought him his surtout aired from the kitchen, and, like a "forward piece," as she was, helped him on with it, and accepted, in return, a smile, a "thank you, my girl," and a shilling. Two ladies called one day, pale and anxious, and begged earnestly, humbly, to be allowed to see Mr Moore one instant; Mrs Yorke hardened her heart, and sent them packing,—not without opprobrium.

But how was it when Hortense Moore came?—Not so bad as might have been expected: the whole family of the Moores really seemed to suit Mrs Yorke so as no other family had ever suited her. Hortense and she possessed an exhaustless mutual theme of conversation in the corrupt propensities of servants. Their views of this class were similar: they watched them with the same suspicion, and judged them with the same severity. Hortense, too, from the very first showed no manner of jealousy of Mrs Yorke's attentions to Robert; she let her keep the post of nurse with little interference: and, for herself, found ceaseless occupation in fidgeting about the house, holding the kitchen under surveillance, reporting what passed there, and, in short, making herself generally useful. Visitors, they both of them agreed

in excluding sedulously from the sick-room. They held the young millowner captive, and hardly let the air breathe or the sun shine on him.

Mr MacTurk, the surgeon to whom Moore's case had been committed, pronounced his wound of a dangerous, but, he trusted, not of a hopeless character. At first he wished to place with him a nurse of his own selection; but this neither Mrs Yorke nor Hortense would hear of: they promised faithful observance of directions. He was left, therefore, for the present, in their hands.

Doubtless, they executed the trust to the best of their ability; but something got wrong: the bandages were displaced, or tampered with; great loss of blood followed. MacTurk, being summoned, came with steed afoam. He was one of those surgeons whom it is dangerous to vex: abrupt in his best moods; in his worst, savage. On seeing Moore's state, he relieved his feelings by a little flowery language, with which it is not necessary to strew the present page. A bouquet or two of the choicest blossoms fell on the unperturbed head of one Mr Graves, a stony young assistant he usually carried about with him; with a second nosegay he gifted another young gentleman in his train—an interesting fac-simile of himself, being, indeed, his own son; but the full corbeille of blushing bloom fell to the lot of meddling womankind, en masse.

For the best part of one winter night, himself and satellites were busied about Moore. There, at his bedside, shut up alone with him in his chamber, they wrought and wrangled over his exhausted frame. They three were on one side of the bed, and Death on the other. The conflict was sharp: it lasted till day broke, when the balance between the belligerents seemed so equal that both parties might have claimed the victory.

At dawn, Graves and young MacTurk were left in charge of the patient, while the senior went himself in

search of additional strength, and secured it in the person of Mrs Horsfall, the best nurse on his staff. To this woman he gave Moore in charge, with the sternest injunctions respecting the responsibility laid on her shoulders. She took this responsibility stolidly, as she did also the easy chair at the bed-head. That moment she began her reign.

Mrs Horsfall had one virtue,—orders received from MacTurk she obeyed to the letter: the Ten Commandments were less binding in her eyes than her surgeon's dictum. In other respects, she was no woman, but a dragon. Hortense Moore fell effaced before her; Mrs Yorke withdrew—crushed; yet both these women were personages of some dignity in their own estimation, and of some bulk in the estimation of others. Perfectly cowed by the breadth, the height, the bone, and the brawn of Mrs Horsfall, they retreated to the back-parlour. She, for her part, sat upstairs when she liked, and downstairs when she preferred it: she took her dram three times a day, and her pipe of tobacco four times.

As to Moore, no one now ventured to inquire about him: Mrs Horsfall had him at dry-nurse: it was she who was to do for him; and the general conjecture now ran that she did for him accordingly.

Morning and evening MacTurk came to see him: his case, thus complicated by a new mischance, was become one of interest in the surgeon's eyes: he regarded him as a damaged piece of clock-work, which it would be creditable to his skill to set a-going again. Graves and young MacTurk—Moore's sole other visitors—contemplated him in the light in which they were wont to contemplate the occupant for the time being of the dissecting-room at Stilbro' Infirmary.

Robert Moore had a pleasant time of it: in pain; in danger; too weak to move; almost too weak to

speak; a sort of giantess his keeper; the three surgeons his sole society. Thus he lay through the diminishing days and lengthening nights of the whole drear month of November.

In the commencement of his captivity, Moore used feebly to resist Mrs Horsfall: he hated the sight of her rough bulk, and dreaded the contact of her hard hands; but she taught him docility in a trice. She made no account whatever of his six feet—his manly thews and sinews: she turned him in his bed as another woman would have turned a babe in its cradle. When he was good, she addressed him as "my dear," and "honey;" and when he was bad, she sometimes shook him. Did he attempt to speak when MacTurk was there, she lifted her hand and bade him "hush!" like a nurse checking a forward child. If she had not smoked—if she had not taken gin, it would have been better, he thought; but she did both. Once—in her absence—he intimated to MacTurk, that "that woman was a dram-drinker."

"Pooh! my dear sir; they are all so," was the reply he got for his pains. "But Horsfall has this virtue," added the surgeon,—"drunk or sober, she always remembers to obey *me*."

At length the latter autumn passed; its fogs, its rains withdrew from England their mourning and their tears; its winds swept on to sigh over lands far away. Behind November came deep winter; clearness, stillness, frost accompanying.

A calm day had settled into a crystalline evening: the world wore a North Pole colouring: all its lights and tints looked like the "reflets" * of white, or violet, or pale green gems. The hills wore a lilac blue;

* Find me an English word as good, reader, and I will gladly dispense with the French word. Reflections won't do.

the setting sun had purple in its red; the sky was ice, all silvered azure; when the stars rose, they were of white crystal—not gold; grey, or cerulean, or faint emerald hues—cool, pure, and transparent—tinged the mass of the landscape.

What is this by itself in a wood no longer green, no longer even russet; a wood, neutral tint—this dark blue moving object? Why, it is a schoolboy—a Briarfield grammar-schoolboy—who has left his companions, now trudging home by the high road, and is seeking a certain tree, with a certain mossy mound at its root—convenient as a seat. Why is he lingering here?—the air is cold, and the time wears late. He sits down: what is he thinking about? Does he feel the chaste charm Nature wears to-night? A pearl-white moon smiles through the green trees: does he care for her smile?

Impossible to say; for he is silent, and his countenance does not speak: as yet, it is no mirror to reflect sensation, but rather a mask to conceal it. This boy is a stripling of fifteen—slight, and tall of his years; in his face there is as little of amenity as of servility: his eye seems prepared to note any incipient attempt to control or overreach him, and the rest of his features indicate faculties alert for resistance. Wise ushers avoid unnecessary interference with that lad. To break him in by severity would be a useless attempt; to win him by flattery would be an effort worse than useless. He is best let alone. Time will educate, and experience train him.

Professedly, Martin Yorke (it is young Yorke, of course) tramples on the name of poetry: talk sentiment to him, and you would be answered by sarcasm. Here he is, wandering alone, waiting duteously on Nature, while she unfolds a page of stern, of silent, and of solemn poetry, beneath his attentive gaze.

Being seated, he takes from his satchel a book—not

the Latin grammar, but a contraband volume of fairy tales; there will be light enough yet for an hour to serve his keen young vision: besides, the moon waits on him —her beam, dim and vague as yet, fills the glade where he sits.

He reads: he is led into a solitary mountain region; all round him is rude and desolate, shapeless, and almost colourless. He hears bells tinkle on the wind: forth-riding from the formless folds of the mist, dawns on him the brightest vision—a green-robed lady, on a snow-white palfrey; he sees her dress, her gems, and her steed; she arrests him with some mysterious question: he is spell-bound, and must follow her into Fairyland.

A second legend bears him to the sea-shore; there tumbles in a strong tide, boiling at the base of dizzy cliffs: it rains and blows. A reef of rocks, black and rough, stretches far into the sea; all along, and among, and above these crags, dash and flash, sweep and leap, swells, wreaths, drifts of snowy spray. Some lone wanderer is out on these rocks, treading, with cautious step, the wet, wild sea-weed; glancing down into hollows where the brine lies fathoms deep and emerald-clear, and seeing there wilder and stranger, and huger vegetation, than is found on land, with treasure of shells —some green, some purple, some pearly—clustered in the curls of the snaky plants. He hears a cry. Looking up, and forward, he sees, at the bleak point of the reef, a tall, pale thing—shaped like man, but made of spray—transparent, tremulous, awful: it stands not alone: they are all human figures that wanton in the rocks—a crowd of foam-women—a band of white, evanescent Nereides.

Hush:—shut the book: hide it in the satchel:—Martin hears a tread. He listens: No—yes; once more the dead leaves, lightly crushed, rustle on the

wood-path. Martin watches: the trees part, and a woman issues forth.

She is a lady dressed in dark silk, a veil covering her face. Martin never met a lady in this wood before —nor any female, save, now and then, a village-girl come to gather nuts. To-night, the apparition does not displease him. He observes, as she approaches, that she is neither old nor plain, but, on the contrary, very youthful; and, but that he now recognises her for one whom he has often wilfully pronounced ugly, he would deem that he discovered traits of beauty behind the thin gauze of that veil.

She passes him, and says nothing. He knew she would: all women are proud monkeys—and he knows no more conceited doll than that Caroline Helstone. The thought is hardly hatched in his mind, when the lady retraces those two steps she had got beyond him, and raising her veil, reposes her glance on his face, while she softly asks—"Are you one of Mr Yorke's sons?"

No human evidence would ever have been able to persuade Martin Yorke that he blushed when thus addressed; yet blush he did, to the ears.

"I am," he said bluntly; and encouraged himself to wonder, superciliously, what would come next.

"You are Martin, I think?" was the observation that followed.

It could not have been more felicitous: it was a simple sentence—very artlessly, a little timidly, pronounced; but it chimed in harmony to the youth's nature: it stilled him like a note of music.

Martin had a keen sense of his personality: he felt it right and sensible that the girl should discriminate him from his brothers. Like his father, he hated ceremony: it was acceptable to hear a lady address him as "Martin," and not Mr Martin or Master Martin, which form

would have lost her his good graces for ever. Worse, if possible, than ceremony, was the other extreme of slipshod familiarity: the slight tone of bashfulness—the scarcely perceptible hesitation—was considered perfectly in place.

"I am Martin," he said.

"Are your father and mother well?"—(it was lucky she did not say *papa* and *mamma*: that would have undone all)—"and Rose and Jessy?"

"I suppose so."

"My cousin Hortense is still at Briarmains?"

"Oh, yes!"

Martin gave a comic half-smile and demi-groan: the half-smile was responded to by the lady, who could guess in what sort of odour Hortense was likely to be held by the young Yorkes.

"Does your mother like her?"

"They suit so well about the servants, they can't help liking each other!"

"It is cold to-night."

"Why are you out so late?"

"I lost my way in this wood."

Now, indeed, Martin allowed himself a refreshing laugh of scorn.

"Lost your way in the mighty forest of Briarmains! You deserve never more to find it."

"I never was here before, and I believe I am trespassing now: you might inform against me if you chose, Martin, and have me fined: it is your father's wood."

"I should think I knew that; but since you are so simple as to lose your way, I will guide you out."

"You need not: I have got into the track now: I shall be right. Martin" (a little quickly), "how is Mr Moore?"

Martin had heard certain rumours: it struck him that it might be amusing to make an experiment.

"Going to die. Nothing can save him. All hope flung overboard!"

She put her veil aside. She looked into his eyes, and said—"To die!"

"To die. All along of the women, my mother and the rest: they did something about his bandages that finished everything: he would have got better but for them. I am sure they should be arrested, cribbed, tried, and brought in for Botany Bay, at the very least."

The questioner, perhaps, did not hear this judgment: she stood motionless. In two minutes, without another word, she moved forwards: no good-night, no further inquiry. This was not amusing, nor what Martin had calculated on: he expected something dramatic and demonstrative: it was hardly worth while to frighten the girl, if she would not entertain him in return. He called—"Miss Helstone!"

She did not hear or turn. He hastened after and overtook her.

"Come. Are you uneasy about what I said?"

"You know nothing about death, Martin: you are too young for me to talk to concerning such a thing."

"Did you believe me? It's all flummery! Moore eats like three men: they are always making sago or tapioca, or something good for him: I never go into the kitchen, but there is a saucepan on the fire, cooking him some dainty. I think I will play the old soldier, and be fed on the fat of the land like him."

"Martin! Martin!" Here her voice trembled, and she stopped.

"It is exceedingly wrong of you, Martin: you have almost killed me."

Again she stopped: she leaned against a tree, trembling, shuddering, and as pale as death.

Martin contemplated her with inexpressible curiosity. In one sense it was, as he would have expressed it,

"nuts" to him to see this: it told him so much, and he was beginning to have a great relish for discovering secrets; in another sense, it reminded him of what he had once felt when he had heard a blackbird lamenting for her nestlings, which Matthew had crushed with a stone, and that was not a pleasant feeling. Unable to find anything very appropriate to *say*, in order to comfort her, he began to cast about in his mind what he could *do*: he smiled: the lad's smile gave wondrous transparency to his physiognomy.

"Eureka!" he cried. "I'll set all straight by-and-by. You are better now, Miss Caroline; walk forward," he urged.

Not reflecting that it would be more difficult for Miss Helstone than for himself to climb a wall or penetrate a hedge, he piloted her by a short cut which led to no gate. The consequence was he had to help her over some formidable obstacles, and, while he railed at her for helplessness, he perfectly liked to feel himself of use.

"Martin, before we separate, assure me seriously, and on your word of honour, that Mr Moore is better."

"How very much you think of that Moore!"

"No—but—many of his friends may ask me, and I wish to be able to give an authentic answer."

"You may tell them he is well enough, only idle: you may tell them that he takes mutton-chops for dinner, and the best of arrowroot for supper. I intercepted a basin myself one night on its way upstairs, and ate half of it."

"And who waits on him, Martin? Who nurses him?"

"Nurses him?—the great baby! Why, a woman as round and big as our largest water-butt—a rough, hard-favoured old girl. I make no doubt she leads him

a rich life: nobody else is let near him: he is chiefly in the dark. It is my belief she knocks him about terribly in that chamber. I listen at the wall sometimes when I am in bed, and I think I hear her thumping him. You should see her fist: she could hold half-a-dozen hands like yours in her one palm. After all, notwithstanding the chops and jellies he gets, I would not be in his shoes. In fact, it is my private opinion that she eats most of what goes up on the tray to Mr Moore. I wish she may not be starving him."

Profound silence and meditation on Caroline's part, and a sly watchfulness on Martin's.

"You never see him, I suppose, Martin?"

"I? No: I don't care to see him, for my own part."

Silence again.

"Did not you come to our house once with Mrs Pryor, about five weeks since, to ask after him?" again inquired Martin.

"Yes."

"I daresay you wished to be shown upstairs?"

"We *did* wish it: we entreated it; but your mother declined."

"Aye! she declined. I heard it all: she treated you as it is her pleasure to treat visitors now and then: she behaved to you rudely and harshly."

"She was not kind; for, you know, Martin, we are relations, and it is natural we should take an interest in Mr Moore. But here we must part: we are at your father's gate."

"Very well—what of that? I shall walk home with you?"

"They will miss you, and wonder where you are."

"Let them. . . . I can take care of myself, I suppose."

Martin knew that he had already incurred the penalty of a lecture, and dry bread for his tea. No matter, the evening had furnished him with an adventure: it was better than muffins and toast.

He walked home with Caroline. On the way he promised to see Mr Moore, in spite of the dragon who guarded his chamber, and appointed an hour on the next day, when Caroline was to come to Briarmains Wood and get tidings of him: he would meet her at a certain tree. The scheme led to nothing: still he liked it.

Having reached home, the dry bread and the lecture were duly administered to him, and he was dismissed to bed at an early hour. He accepted his punishment with the toughest stoicism.

Ere ascending to his chamber he paid a secret visit to the dining-room, a still, cold, stately apartment, seldom used; for the family customarily dined in the back-parlour. He stood before the mantelpiece, and lifted his candle to two pictures hung above—female heads: one, a type of serene beauty—happy and innocent; the other, more lovely—but forlorn and desperate.

"She looked like *that*," he said, gazing on the latter sketch, "when she sobbed, turned white, and leaned against the tree."

"I suppose," he pursued, when he was in his room, and seated on the edge of his pallet-bed—"I suppose she is what they call, '*in love;*' yes, *in love* with that long thing in the next chamber. Whist! is that Horsfall clattering him? I wonder he does not yell out. It really sounds as if she had fallen on him tooth and nail; but I suppose she is making the bed. I saw her at it once—she hit into the mattresses as if she was boxing. It is queer, Zillah (they call her Zillah)—Zillah Horsfall is a woman, and Caroline Helstone is a woman: they are two individuals of the same species—

not much alike though. Is she a pretty girl, that Caroline? I suspect she is—very nice to look at—something so clear in her face—so soft in her eyes. I approve of her looking at me; it does me good. She has long eyelashes: their shadow seems to rest where she gazes, and to instil peace and thought. If she behaves well, and continues to suit me, as she has suited me to-day, I may do her a good turn. I rather relish the notion of circumventing my mother and that ogress, old Horsfall. Not that I like humouring Moore; but whatever I do I'll be paid for, and in coin of my own choosing: I know what reward I will claim—one displeasing to Moore, and agreeable to myself."

He turned into bed.

Chapter xxxiij.

MARTIN'S TACTICS.

IT was necessary to the arrangement of Martin's plan, that he should stay at home that day. Accordingly, he found no appetite for breakfast; and, just about school-time, took a severe pain about his heart, which rendered it advisable that, instead of setting out to the grammar-school with Mark, he should succeed to his father's arm-chair by the fireside, and also to his morning-paper. This point being satisfactorily settled, and Mark being gone to Mr Summer's class, and Matthew and Mr Yorke withdrawn to the counting-house, three other exploits, nay four, remained to be achieved.

The first of these was to realise the breakfast he had not yet tasted, and with which his appetite of fifteen could ill afford to dispense; the second, third, fourth, to get his mother, Miss Moore and Mrs Horsfall

successively, out of the way before four o'clock that afternoon.

The first was, for the present, the most pressing, since the work before him demanded an amount of energy which the present empty condition of his youthful stomach did not seem likely to supply.

Martin knew the way to the larder; and knowing this way, he took it. The servants were in the kitchen, breakfasting solemnly with closed doors; his mother and Miss Moore were airing themselves on the lawn; and discussing the closed doors aforesaid: Martin, safe in the larder, made fastidious selection from its stores. His breakfast had been delayed—he was determined it should be recherché: it appeared to him that a variety on his usual somewhat insipid fare of bread and milk was both desirable and advisable: the savoury and the salutary he thought might be combined. There was store of rosy apples laid in straw upon a shelf; he picked out three. There was pastry upon a dish; he selected an apricot-puff and a damson tart. On the plain household bread his eye did not dwell; but he surveyed with favour some currant tea-cakes, and condescended to make choice of one. Thanks to his clasp-knife, he was able to appropriate a wing of fowl and a slice of ham; a cantlet of cold custard-pudding he thought would harmonise with these articles; and having made this final addition to his booty, he at length sallied forth into the hall.

He was already half-way across—three steps more would have anchored him in the harbour of the back-parlour—when the front door opened, and there stood Matthew. Better far had it been the Old Gentleman, in full equipage of horns, hoofs, and tail.

Matthew, sceptic and scoffer, had already failed to subscribe a prompt belief in that pain about the heart: he had muttered some words, amongst which the phrase

"shamming Abraham" had been very distinctly audible; and the succession to the arm-chair and newspaper had appeared to affect him with mental spasms: the spectacle now before him, the apples, the tarts, the tea-cake, the fowl, ham, and pudding, offered evidence but too well calculated to inflate his opinion of his own sagacity.

Martin paused "interdit" one minute, one instant; the next he knew his ground, and pronounced all well. With the true perspicacity "des âmes élites," he at once saw how this—at first sight untoward event—might be turned to excellent account: he saw how it might be so handled as to secure the accomplishment of his second task, viz., the disposal of his mother. He knew that a collision between him and Matthew always suggested to Mrs Yorke the propriety of a fit of hysterics; he further knew that, on the principle of calm succeeding to storm, after a morning of hysterics his mother was sure to indulge in an afternoon of bed. This would accommodate him perfectly.

The collision duly took place in the hall. A dry laugh, an insulting sneer, a contemptuous taunt, met by a nonchalant but most cutting reply, were the signals. They rushed at it. Martin, who usually made little noise on these occasions, made a great deal now. In flew the servants, Mrs Yorke, Miss Moore: no female hand could separate them. Mr Yorke was summoned.

"Sons," said he, "one of you must leave my roof if this occurs again: I will have no Cain and Abel strife here."

Martin now allowed himself to be taken off: he had been hurt; he was the youngest and slightest: he was quite cool, in no passion: he even smiled, content that the most difficult part of the labour he had set himself was over.

Once he seemed to flag in the course of the morning.

"It is not worth while to bother myself for that Caroline," he remarked. But, a quarter of an hour afterwards, he was again in the dining-room, looking at the head with dishevelled tresses, and eyes turbid with despair.

"Yes," he said, "I made her sob, shudder, almost faint: I'll see her smile before I've done with her: besides, I want to outwit all these womenites."

Directly after dinner, Mrs Yorke fulfilled her son's calculation, by withdrawing to her chamber. Now for Hortense.

That lady was just comfortably settled to stocking-mending in the back parlour, when Martin—laying down a book which, stretched on the sofa (he was still indisposed, according to his own account), he had been perusing in all the voluptuous ease of a yet callow pacha—lazily introduced some discourse about Sarah, the maid at the Hollow. In the course of much verbal meandering, he insinuated information that this damsel was said to have three suitors, Frederic Murgatroyd, Jeremiah Pighills, and John-of-Mally's-of-Hannah's-of-Deb's; and that Miss Mann had affirmed she knew for a fact, that, now the girl was left in sole charge of the cottage, she often had her swains to meals, and entertained them with the best the house afforded.

It needed no more. Hortense could not have lived another hour without betaking herself to the scene of these nefarious transactions, and inspecting the state of matters in person. Mrs Horsfall remained.

Martin, master of the field now, extracted from his mother's work-basket a bunch of keys; with these he opened the sideboard cupboard, produced thence a black bottle and a small glass, placed them on the table, nimbly mounted the stairs, made for Mr Moore's door, tapped, the nurse opened.

"If you please, ma'am, you are invited to step into

the back-parlour, and take some refreshment: you will not be disturbed: the family are out."

He watched her down; he watched her in; himself shut the door: he knew she was safe.

The hard work was done; now for the pleasure. He snatched his cap, and away for the wood.

It was yet but half-past three; it had been a fine morning, but the sky looked dark now: it was beginning to snow; the wind blew cold; the wood looked dismal; the old tree grim. Yet Martin approved the shadow on his path: he found a charm in the spectral aspect of the doddered oak.

He had to wait; to and fro he walked, while the flakes fell faster; and the wind, which at first had but moaned, pitifully howled.

"She is long in coming," he muttered, as he glanced along the narrow track. "I wonder," he subjoined, "what I wish to see her so much for? She is not coming for me. But I have power over her, and I want her to come that I may use that power."

He continued his walk.

"Now," he resumed, when a further period had elapsed, "if she fails to come, I shall hate and scorn her."

It struck four: he heard the church-clock far away. A step so quick, so light, that, but for the rustling of leaves, it would scarcely have sounded on the wood-walk, checked his impatience. The wind blew fiercely now, and the thickened white storm waxed bewildering: but on she came, and not dismayed.

"Well, Martin," she said eagerly, "how is he?"

"It is queer how she thinks of *him*," reflected Martin: "the blinding snow and bitter cold are nothing to her, I believe: yet she is but a 'chitty-faced creature,' as my mother would say. I could find in my heart to wish I had a cloak to wrap her in."

Thus meditating to himself, he neglected to answer Miss Helstone.

"You have seen him?"

"No."

"Oh! You promised you would."

"I mean to do better by you than that. Didn't I say *I* don't care to see him?"

"But now it will be so long before I get to know anything certain about him, and I am sick of waiting. Martin, *do* see him, and give him Caroline Helstone's regards, and say she wished to know how he was, and if anything could be done for his comfort."

"I won't."

"You are changed: you were so friendly last night."

"Come: we must not stand in this wood; it is too cold."

"But, before I go, promise me to come again to-morrow with news."

"No such thing; I am much too delicate to make and keep such appointments in the winter season: if you knew what a pain I had in my chest this morning, and how I went without breakfast, and was knocked down besides, you'd feel the impropriety of bringing me here in the snow. Come, I say."

"Are you really delicate, Martin?"

"Don't I look so?"

"You have rosy cheeks."

"That's hectic. Will you come—or you won't?"

"Where?"

"With me. I was a fool not to bring a cloak: I would have made you cosy."

"You are going home! my nearest road lies in the opposite direction."

"Put your arm through mine. I'll take care of you."

"But, the wall—the hedge—it is such hard work

climbing, and you are too slender and young to help me without hurting yourself."

"You shall go through the gate."

"But"——

"But!—but! Will you trust me or not?"

She looked into his face.

"I think I will. Anything rather than return as anxious as I came."

"I can't answer for that. This, however, I promise you; be ruled by me, and you shall see Moore yourself."

"See him myself?"

"Yourself."

"But, dear Martin, does he know?'

"Ah! I'm dear now. No: he doesn't know."

"And your mother and the others?"

"All is right."

Caroline fell into a long silent fit of musing, but still she walked on with her guide: they came in sight of Briarmains."

"Have you made up your mind?" he asked.

She was silent.

"Decide. We are just on the spot. I *won't* see him—that I tell you—except to announce your arrival."

"Martin, you are a strange boy, and this is a strange step; but all I feel *is* and *has* been, for a long time, strange. I will see him."

"Having said that, you will neither hesitate nor retract?"

"No."

"Here we are, then. Do not be afraid of passing the parlour-window: no one will see you. My father and Matthew are at the mill; Mark is at school; the servants are in the back-kitchen; Miss Moore is at the cottage; my mother in her bed; and Mrs Horsfall

in Paradise. Observe—I need not ring: I open the door; the hall is empty; the staircase quiet; so is the gallery: the whole house and all its inhabitants are under a spell, which I will not break till you are gone."

"Martin, I trust you."

"You never said a better word. Let me take your shawl: I will shake off the snow and dry it for you. You are cold and wet: never mind; there is a fire upstairs. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Follow me."

He left his shoes on the mat; mounted the stair unshod; Caroline stole after, with noiseless step: there was a gallery, and there was a passage; at the end of that passage Martin paused before a door and tapped: he had to tap twice—thrice: a voice, known to one listener, at last said—"Come in."

The boy entered briskly.

"Mr Moore, a lady called to inquire after you: none of the women were about: it is washing day, and the maids are over the crown of the head in soap-suds in the back-kitchen; so I asked her to step up."

"Up here, sir?"

"Up here, sir; but if you object, she shall go down again."

"Is this a place, or am I a person to bring a lady to, you absurd lad?"

"No: so I'll take her off."

"Martin, you will stay here. Who is she?"

"Your grandmother from that château on the Scheldt Miss Moore talks about."

"Martin," said the softest whisper at the door, "don't be foolish."

"Is she there?" inquired Moore hastily. He had caught an imperfect sound.

"She is there, fit to faint: she is standing on the mat, shocked at your want of filial affection."

"Martin, you are an evil cross between an imp and a page. What is she like?"

"More like me than you; for she is young and beautiful."

"You are to show her forward. Do you hear?"

"Come, Miss Caroline."

"Miss Caroline!" repeated Moore.

And when Miss Caroline entered, she was encountered in the middle of the chamber by a tall, thin, wasted figure, who took both her hands.

"I give you a quarter of an hour," said Martin as he withdrew: "no more. Say what you have to say in that time: till it is past, I will wait in the gallery: nothing shall approach: I'll see you safe away. Should you persist in staying longer, I leave you to your fate."

He shut the door. In the gallery he was as elate as a king: he had never been engaged in an adventure he liked so well; for no adventure had ever invested him with so much importance, or inspired him with so much interest.

"You are come at last," said the meagre man, gazing on his visitress with hollow eyes.

"Did you expect me before?"

"For a month—near two months, we have been very near; and I have been in sad pain, and danger, and misery, Cary."

"I could not come."

"Couldn't you? But the Rectory and Briarmains are very near: not two miles apart."

There was pain—there was pleasure in the girl's face as she listened to these implied reproaches: it was sweet—it was bitter to defend herself.

"When I say I could not come, I mean I could not see you; for I came with mamma the very day we

heard what had happened. Mr MacTurk then told us it was impossible to admit any stranger."

"But afterwards—every fine afternoon these many weeks past I have waited and listened. Something here, Cary" (laying his hand on his breast), "told me it was impossible but that you should think of me. Not that I merit thought; but we are old acquaintance: we are cousins."

"I came again, Robert: mamma and I came again."

"Did you? Come, that is worth hearing: since you came again, we will sit down and talk about it."

They sat down. Caroline drew her chair up to his. The air was now dark with snow: an Iceland blast was driving it wildly. This pair neither heard the long "wuthering" rush, nor saw the white burden it drifted: each seemed conscious but of one thing—the presence of the other.

"And so mamma and you came again?"

"And Mrs Yorke did treat us strangely. We asked to see you. 'No,' said she; 'not in my house. I am at present responsible for his life: it shall not be forfeited for half-an-hour's idle gossip.' But I must not tell you all she said: it was very disagreeable. However, we came yet again—mamma, Miss Keeldar, and I. This time we thought we should conquer, as we were three against one, and Shirley was on our side. But Mrs Yorke opened such a battery."

Moore smiled. "What did she say?"

"Things that astonished us. Shirley laughed at last; I cried; mamma was seriously annoyed: we were all three driven from the field. Since that time I have only walked once a day past the house, just for the satisfaction of looking up at your window, which I could distinguish by the drawn curtains. I really dared not come in."

"I *have* wished for you, Caroline."

"I did not know that. I never dreamt one instant that you thought of me. If I had but most distantly imagined such a possibility"——

"Mrs Yorke would still have beaten you."

"She would not. Stratagem should have been tried, if persuasion failed. I would have come to the kitchen-door; the servant should have let me in; and I would have walked straight upstairs. In fact, it was far more the fear of intrusion—the fear of yourself, that baffled me, than the fear of Mrs Yorke."

"Only last night, I despaired of ever seeing you again. Weakness has wrought terrible depression in me—terrible depression."

"And you sit alone?"

"Worse than alone."

"But you must be getting better, since you can leave your bed?"

"I doubt whether I shall live: I see nothing for it, after such exhaustion, but decline."

"You—you shall go home to the Hollow."

"Dreariness would accompany—nothing cheerful come near me."

"I *will* alter this: this *shall* be altered, were there ten Mrs Yorkes to do battle with."

"Cary, you make me smile."

"Do smile: smile again. Shall I tell you what I should like?"

"Tell me anything—only keep talking. I am Saul: but for music I should perish."

"I should like you to be brought to the Rectory, and given to me and mamma."

"A precious gift! I have not laughed since they shot me till now."

"Do you suffer pain, Robert?"

"Not so much pain now; but I am hopelessly

weak, and the state of my mind is inexpressible—dark, barren, impotent. Do you not read it all in my face? I look a mere ghost."

"Altered, yet I should have known you anywhere: but I understand your feelings: I experienced something like it. Since we met, I too have been very ill."

"*Very* ill?"

"I thought I should die. The tale of my life seemed told. Every night, just at midnight, I used to wake from awful dreams—and the book lay open before me at the last page, where was written 'Finis.' I had strange feelings."

"You speak my experience."

"I believed I should never see you again; and I grew so thin—as thin as you are now: I could do nothing for myself—neither rise nor lie down; and I could not eat—yet, you see I am better."

"Comforter! sad as sweet: I am too feeble to say what I feel; but, while you speak, I *do* feel."

"Here, I am at your side, where I thought never more to be; here I speak to you—I see you listen to me willingly—look at me kindly. Did I count on that? I despaired."

Moore sighed—a sigh so deep, it was nearly a groan: he covered his eyes with his hand.

"May I be spared to make some atonement."

Such was his prayer.

"And for what?"

"We will not touch on it now, Cary; unmanned as I am, I have not the power to cope with such a topic. Was Mrs Pryor with you during your illness?"

"Yes" (Caroline smiled brightly)—"you know she is mamma?"

"I have heard Hortense told me; but that tale

too I will receive from yourself. Does she add to your happiness?"

"What! mamma? She is *dear* to me; *how* dear I cannot say. I was altogether weary, and she held me up."

"I deserve to hear that in a moment when I can scarce lift my hand to my head. I deserve it."

"It is no reproach against you."

"It is a coal of fire heaped on my head; and so is every word you address to me, and every look that lights your sweet face. Come still nearer, Lina; and give me your hand—if my thin fingers do not scare you."

She took those thin fingers between her two little hands—she bent her head "et les effleura de ses lèvres" (I put that in French, because the word "effleurer" is an exquisite word). Moore was much moved: a large tear or two coursed down his hollow cheek.

"I'll keep these things in my heart, Cary; that kiss I will put by, and you shall hear of it again some day."

"Come out!" cried Martin, opening the door. "Come away—you have had twenty minutes instead of a quarter of an hour."

"She will not stir yet—you hempseed."

"I dare not stay longer, Robert."

"Can you promise to return?"

"No, she can't," responded Martin. "The thing mustn't become customary: I can't be troubled. It's very well for once: I'll not have it repeated."

"*You*'ll not have it repeated."

"Hush! don't vex him—we could not have met to-day but for him: but I will come again, if it is your wish that I should come."

"It *is* my wish—my *one* wish—almost the only wish I can feel."

"Come this minute: my mother has coughed, got up, set her feet on the floor. Let her only catch you on the stairs, Miss Caroline: you're not to bid him good-bye" (stepping between her and Moore),—"you are to march."

"My shawl, Martin."

"I have it. I'll put it on for you when you are in the hall."

He made them part: he would suffer no farewell but what could be expressed in looks: he half carried Caroline down the stairs. In the hall he wrapped her shawl round her, and—but that his mother's tread then creaked in the gallery, and but that a sentiment of diffidence—the proper, natural, therefore the noble impulse of his boy's heart, held him back, he would have claimed his reward—he would have said, "Now, Miss Caroline, for all this give me one kiss." But ere the words had passed his lips, she was across the snowy road, rather skimming than wading the drifts.

"She is my debtor, and I *will* be paid."

He flattered himself that it was opportunity, not audacity, which had failed him: he misjudged the quality of his own nature, and held it for something lower than it was.

Chapter xxxiv.

CASE OF DOMESTIC PERSECUTION—REMARKABLE INSTANCE OF PIOUS PERSEVERANCE IN THE DISCHARGE OF RELIGIOUS DUTIES.

MARTIN, having known the taste of excitement, wanted a second draught; having felt the dignity of power, he loathed to relinquish it. Miss Helstone—that girl he had always called ugly, and

whose face was now perpetually before his eyes, by day and by night, in dark and in sunshine—had once come within his sphere: it fretted him to think the visit might never be repeated.

Though a schoolboy, he was no ordinary schoolboy: he was destined to grow up an original. At a few years later date, he took great pains to pare and polish himself down to the pattern of the rest of the world, but he never succeeded: an unique stamp marked him always. He now sat idle at his desk in the grammar-school, casting about in his mind for the means of adding another chapter to his commenced romance: he did not yet know how many commenced life-romances are doomed never to get beyond the first—or, at most, the second chapter. His Saturday half-holiday he spent in the wood with his book of fairy legends, and that other unwritten book of his imagination.

Martin harboured an irreligious reluctance to see the approach of Sunday. His father and mother—while disclaiming community with the Establishment—failed not duly, once on the sacred day, to fill their large pew in Briarfield church with the whole of their blooming family. Theoretically, Mr Yorke placed all sects and churches on a level: Mrs Yorke awarded the palm to Moravians and Quakers, on account of that crown of humility by these worthies worn: neither of them were ever known, however, to set foot in a conventicle.

Martin, I say, disliked Sunday, because the morning service was long, and the sermon usually little to his taste: this Saturday afternoon, however, his woodland musings disclosed to him a new-found charm in the coming day.

It proved a day of deep snow: so deep, that Mrs Yorke, during breakfast, announced her conviction that the children, both boys and girls, would be better at home; and her decision that, instead of going to

church, they should sit silent for two hours in the back-parlour, while Rose and Martin alternately read a succession of sermons—John Wesley's Sermons: John Wesley, being a Reformer and an Agitator, had a place both in her own and her husband's favour."

"Rose will do as she pleases," said Martin, not looking up from the book which, according to his custom then and in after life, he was studying over his bread and milk.

"Rose will do as she is told, and Martin too," observed the mother.

"I am going to church."

So her son replied, with the ineffable quietude of a true Yorke, who knows his will and means to have it, and who, if pushed to the wall, will let himself be crushed to death, provided no way of escape can be found—but will never capitulate.

"It is not fit weather," said the father.

No answer: the youth read studiously; he slowly broke his bread and sipped his milk.

"Martin hates to go to church, but he hates still more to obey," said Mrs Yorke.

"I suppose I am influenced by pure perverseness?"

"Yes—you are."

"Mother—*I am not.*"

"By what, then, are you influenced?"

"By a complication of motives; the intricacies of which I should as soon think of explaining to you as I should of turning myself inside out to exhibit the internal machinery of my frame."

"Hear Martin! Hear him!" cried Mr Yorke. "I must see and have this lad of mine brought up to the Bar: Nature meant him to live by his tongue. Hesther, your third son must certainly be a lawyer: he has the stock in trade—brass, self-conceit, and words—words—words."

"Some bread, Rose, if you please," requested Martin with intense gravity, serenity, phlegm: the boy had naturally a low, plaintive voice, which, in his "dour moods," rose scarcely above a lady's whisper: the more inflexibly stubborn the humour, the softer, the sadder the tone. He rang the bell, and gently asked for his walking-shoes.

"But, Martin," urged his sire, "there is drift all the way—a man could hardly wade through it. However, lad," he continued, seeing that the boy rose as the church-bell began to toll, "this is a case wherein I would by no means balk the obdurate chap of his will. Go to church by all means. There is a pitiless wind, and a sharp, frozen sleet, besides the depth under foot. Go out into it, since thou prefers it to a warm fireside."

Martin quietly assumed his cloak, comforter, and cap, and deliberately went out.

"My father has more sense than my mother," he pronounced. "How women miss it! They drive the nail into the flesh, thinking they are hammering away at insensate stone."

He reached church early.

"Now, if the weather frightens her (and it is a real December tempest), or if that Mrs Pryor objects to her going out, and I should miss her after all, it will vex me: but, tempest or tornado, hail or ice, she *ought* to come; and, if she has a mind worthy of her eyes and features, she *will* come: she will be here for the chance of seeing me, as I am here for the chance of seeing her: she will want to get a word respecting her confounded sweetheart, as I want to get another flavour of what I think the essence of life: a taste of existence, with the spirit preserved in it, and not evaporated. Adventure is to stagnation what champagne is to flat porter."

He looked round. The church was cold, silent, empty, but for one old woman. As the chimes sub-

sided, and the single bell tolled slowly, another and another elderly parishioner came dropping in, and took a grim humble station in the free sittings. It is always the frailest, the oldest, and the poorest that brave the worst weather, to prove and maintain their constancy to dear old mother Church: this wild morning not one affluent family attended, not one carriage party appeared—all the lined and cushioned pews were empty; only on the bare oaken seats sat ranged the grey-haired elders and feeble paupers.

"I'll scorn her, if she doesn't come," muttered Martin shortly and savagely to himself. The Rector's shovel-hat had passed the porch: Mr Helstone and his clerk were in the vestry.

The bells ceased—the reading-desk was filled—the doors were closed—the service commenced: void stood the Rectory pew—she was not there: Martin scorned her.

"Worthless thing! Vapid thing! Commonplace humbug! Like all other girls—weakly, selfish, shallow!"

Such was Martin's liturgy.

"She is not like our picture: her eyes are not large and expressive: her nose is not straight, delicate, Hellenic: her mouth has not that charm I thought it had—which, I imagined, could beguile me of sullenness in my worst moods. What is she? A thread-paper, a doll, a toy—a *girl*, in short."

So absorbed was the young cynic, he forgot to rise from his knees at the proper place, and was still in an exemplary attitude of devotion when—the litany over—the first hymn was given out. To be so caught did not contribute to soothe him: he started up red (for he was as sensitive to ridicule as any girl). To make the matter worse, the church-door had re-opened, and the aisles were filling: patter, patter, patter, a hundred little

feet trotted in. It was the Sunday-scholars. According to Briarfield winter custom, these children had now been kept where there was a warm stove, and led into church just before the Communion and Sermon.

The little ones were settled first, and at last, when the boys and the younger girls were all arranged—when the organ was swelling high, and the choir and congregation were rising to uplift a spiritual song—a tall class of young women came quietly in, closing the procession. Their teacher, having seen them seated, passed into the Rectory-pew. The French-grey cloak and small beaver bonnet were known to Martin: it was the very costume his eyes had ached to catch. Miss Helstone had not suffered the storm to prove an impediment: after all, she was come to church. Martin probably whispered his satisfaction to his hymn-book; at any rate, he therewith hid his face two minutes.

Satisfied or not, he had time to get very angry with her again before the sermon was over; she had never once looked his way: at least, he had not been so lucky as to encounter a glance.

"If," he said—"if she takes no notice of me; if she shows I am not in her thoughts, I shall have a worse, a meaner opinion of her than ever. Most despicable would it be to come for the sake of those sheep-faced Sunday scholars, and not for my sake, or that long skeleton Moore's."

The sermon found an end; the benediction was pronounced; the congregation dispersed: she had not been near him.

Now, indeed, as Martin set his face homeward, he felt that the sleet was sharp, and the east wind cold.

His nearest way lay through some fields: it was a dangerous, because an untrodden way: he did not care; he would take it. Near the second stile rose a clump of trees: was that an umbrella waiting there? Yes:

side umbrella held with evident difficulty against the angle: behind it fluttered a French-grey cloak. Martin grinned as he toiled up the steep encumbered field, difficult to the foot as a slope in the upper realms of Etna. There was an inimitable look in his face when, having gained the stile, he seated himself coolly thereupon, and thus opened a conference which, for his own part, he was willing to prolong indefinitely.

"I think you had better strike a bargain: exchange me for Mrs Pryor."

"I was not sure whether you would come this way, Martin; but I thought I would run the chance: there is no such thing as getting a quiet word spoken in the church or churchyard."

"Will you agree? Make over Mrs Pryor to my mother, and put me in her skirts?"

"As if I could understand you! What puts Mrs Pryor into your head?"

"You call her 'mamma,' don't you?"

"She *is* my mamma."

"Not possible—or so inefficient, so careless a mamma—I should make a five times better one. You *may* laugh: I have no objection to see you laugh: your teeth—I hate ugly teeth; but yours are as pretty as a pearl necklace, and a necklace, of which the pearls are very fair, even, and well matched too."

"Martin, what now? I thought the Yorkes never paid compliments?"

"They have not done till this generation; but I feel as if it were my vocation to turn out a new variety of the Yorke species. I am rather tired of my own ancestors: we have traditions going back for four ages—tales of Hiram, which was the son of Hiram which was the son of Samuel, which was the son of John, which was the son of Zerubbabel Yorke. All, from Zerubbabel down to the last Hiram, were such as you

see my father. Before that, there was a Godfrey: we have his picture; it hangs in Moore's bedroom; it is like me. Of his character we know nothing; but I am sure it was different to his descendants: he has long curling dark hair; he is carefully and cavalierly dressed. Having said that he is like me, I need not add that he is handsome."

"You are not handsome, Martin."

"No; but wait a while: just let me take my time: I mean to begin from this day to cultivate, to polish,—and we shall see."

"You are a very strange—a very unaccountable boy, Martin; but don't imagine you ever will be handsome: you cannot."

"I mean to try. But we were talking about Mrs Pryor: she must be the most unnatural mamma in existence, coolly to let her daughter come out in this weather. Mine was in such a rage, because I would go to church: she was fit to fling the kitchen-brush after me."

"Mamma was very much concerned about me; but I am afraid I was obstinate: I *would* go."

"To see me?"

"Exactly: I thought of nothing else. I greatly feared the snow would hinder you from coming: you don't know how pleased I was to see you all by yourself in the pew."

"*I* came to fulfil my duty, and set the parish a good example. And so you were obstinate, were you? I should like to see you obstinate, I should. Wouldn't I have you in good discipline if I owned you? Let me take the umbrella."

"I can't stay two minutes: our dinner will be ready."

"And so will ours; and we have always a hot dinner on Sundays. Roast goose to-day, with apple-

pie and rice-pudding. I always contrive to know the bill of fare: well, I like these things uncommonly: but I'll make the sacrifice, if you will."

"We have a cold dinner: my uncle will allow no unnecessary cooking on the Sabbath. But I must return: the house would be in commotion, if I failed to appear."

"So will Briarmains, bless you! I think I hear my father sending out the overlooker and five of the dyers, to look in six directions for the body of his prodigal son in the snow; and my mother repenting her of her many misdeeds towards me, now I am gone."

"Martin, how is Mr Moore?"

"*That* is what you came for—just to say that word."

"Come, tell me quickly."

"Hang him! he is no worse; but as ill-used as ever—mewed up, kept in solitary confinement. They mean to make either an idiot or a maniac of him, and take out a commission of lunacy. Horsfall starves him: you saw how thin he was."

"You were very good the other day, Martin."

"What day? I am always good—a model."

"When will you be so good again?"

"I see what you are after; but you'll not wheedle me: I am no cat's-paw."

"But it must be done: it is quite a right thing, and a necessary thing."

"How you encroach! Remember, I managed the matter of my own free will before."

"And you will again."

"I won't: the business gave me far too much trouble; I like my ease."

"Mr Moore wishes to see me, Martin; and I wish to see him."

"I dare say" (coolly).

"It is too bad of your mother to exclude his friends."

"Tell her so."

"His own relations."

"Come and blow her up."

"You know that would advance nothing. Well, I shall stick to my point. See him I will. If you won't help me, I'll manage without help."

"Do: there is nothing like self-reliance — self-dependence."

"I have no time to reason with you now; but I consider you provoking. Good-morning."

Away she went—the umbrella shut; for she could not carry it against the wind.

"She is not vapid; she is not shallow," said Martin. "I shall like to watch, and mark how she will work her way without help. If the storm were not of snow, but of fire—such as came refreshingly down on the cities of the plain—she would go through it to procure five minutes' speech with that Moore. Now, I consider I have had a pleasant morning: the disappointments got time on: the fears and fits of anger only made that short discourse pleasanter, when it came at last. She expected to coax me at once: she'll not manage that in one effort: she shall come again, again, and yet again. It would please me to put her in a passion—to make her cry: I want to discover how far she will go —what she will do and dare—to get her will. It seems strange and new to find one human being thinking so much about another as she thinks about Moore.—But it is time to go home; my appetite tells me the hour: won't I walk into that goose?—and we'll try whether Matthew or I shall get the largest cut of the apple-pie to-day."

Chapter xxxb.

WHEREIN MATTERS MAKE SOME PROGRESS, BUT NOT MUCH.

MARTIN had planned well: he had laid out a dexterously concerted scheme for his private amusement; but older and wiser schemers than he are often doomed to see their finest-spun projects swept to annihilation by the sudden broom of Fate—that fell housewife, whose red arm none can control. In the present instance, this broom was manufactured out of the tough fibres of Moore's own stubborn purpose, bound tight with his will. He was now resuming his strength, and making strange head against Mrs Horsfall. Each morning he amazed that matron with a fresh astonishment. First, he discharged her from her valet-luties; he would dress himself. Then, he refused the coffee she brought him: he would breakfast with the family. Lastly, he forbade her his chamber. On the same day, amidst the outcries of all the women in the place, he put his head out of doors. The morning after, he followed Mr Yorke to his counting-house, and requested an envoy to fetch a chaise from the Red-House Inn. He was resolved, he said, to return home to the Hollow that very afternoon. Mr Yorke, instead of opposing, aided and abetted him: the chaise was sent for, though Mrs Yorke declared the step would be his death. It came. Moore, little disposed to speak, made his purse do duty for his tongue: he expressed his gratitude to the servants and to Mrs Horsfall, by the chink of his coin. The latter personage approved and understood this language perfectly; it made amends for all previous contumacy: she and her patient parted the best friends in the world.

The kitchen visited and soothed, Moore betook himself to the parlour; he had Mrs Yorke to appease; not

quite so easy a task as the pacification of her housemaids. There she sat plunged in sullen dudgeon; the gloomiest speculations on the depths of man's ingratitude absorbing her thoughts. He drew near and bent over her; she was obliged to look up, if it were only to bid him "avaunt." There was beauty still in his pale, wasted features; there was earnestness, and a sort of sweetness—for he was smiling—in his hollow eyes.

"Good-bye!" he said; and, as he spoke, the smile glittered and melted. He had no iron mastery of his sensations now: a trifling emotion made itself apparent in his present weak state.

"And what are you going to leave us for?" she asked; "we will keep you, and do anything in the world for you, if you will only stay till you are stronger."

"Good-bye!" he again said: and added, "you have been a mother to me: give your wilful son one embrace."

Like a foreigner, as he was, he offered her first one cheek, then the other: she kissed him.

"What a trouble—what a burden I have been to you!" he muttered.

"You are the worst trouble now, headstrong youth!" was the answer. "I wonder who is to nurse you at Hollow's Cottage? your sister Hortense knows no more about such matters than a child."

"Thank God! for I have had nursing enough to last me my life."

Here the little girls came in; Jessy crying, Rose quiet, but grave. Moore took them out into the hall to soothe, pet, and kiss them. He knew it was not their mother's nature to bear to see any living thing caressed but herself: she would have felt annoyed had he fondled a kitten in her presence.

The boys were standing about the chaise as Moore

entered it; but for them he had no farewell. To Mr Yorke he only said—"You have a good riddance of me: that was an unlucky shot for you, Yorke; it turned Briarmains into an hospital. Come and see me at the cottage soon."

He drew up the glass; the chaise rolled away. In half-an-hour he alighted at his own garden-wicket. Having paid the driver and dismissed the vehicle, he leaned on that wicket an instant, at once to rest and to muse.

"Six months ago I passed out of this gate," said he, "a proud, angry, disappointed man; I come back sadder and wiser; weakly enough, but not worried. A cold, grey, yet quiet world lies around—a world where, if I hope little, I fear nothing. All slavish terrors of embarrassment have left me: let the worst come, I can work, as Joe Scott does, for an honourable living: in such doom I yet see some hardship, but no degradation. Formerly, pecuniary ruin was equivalent in my eyes to personal dishonour. It is not so now: I know the difference. Ruin *is* an evil; but one for which I am prepared; the day of whose coming I know, for I have calculated. I can yet put it off six months—not an hour longer: if things by that time alter—which is not probable; if fetters, which now seem indissoluble, should be loosened from our trade (of all things the most unlikely to happen)—I might conquer in this long struggle yet—I might——Good God! what might I not do? But the thought is a brief madness: let me see things with sane eyes. Ruin will come, lay her axe to my fortune's roots, and hew them down. I shall snatch a sapling, I shall cross the sea, and plant it in American woods. Louis will go with me. Will none but Louis go? I cannot tell—I have no right to ask."

He entered the house.

It was afternoon, twilight yet out of doors: starless

and moonless twilight; for, though keenly freezing with a dry, black frost, heaven wore a mask of clouds congealed and fast-locked. The mill-dam too was frozen: the Hollow was very still: indoors it was already dark. Sarah had lit a good fire in the parlour; she was preparing tea in the kitchen.

"Hortense," said Moore, as his sister bustled up to help him off with his cloak, "I am pleased to come home."

Hortense did not feel the peculiar novelty of this expression coming from her brother, who had never before called the cottage his home, and to whom its narrow limits had always heretofore seemed rather restrictive than protective: still, whatever contributed to his happiness pleased her; and she expressed herself to that effect.

He sat down, but soon rose again: he went to the window; he came back to the fire.

"Hortense!"

"Mon frère?"

"This little parlour looks very clean and pleasant: unusually bright, somehow."

"It is true, brother: I have had the whole house thoroughly and scrupulously cleaned in your absence."

"Sister, I think on this first day of your return home, you ought to have a friend or so to tea; if it were only to see how fresh and spruce you have made the little place."

"True, brother: if it were not late I might send for Miss Mann."

"So you might; but it really is too late to disturb that good lady; and the evening is much too cold for her to come out."

"How thoughtful in you, dear Gérard! We must put it off till another day."

"I want some one to-day, dear sister: some quiet guest, who would tire neither of us."

"Miss Ainley?"

"An excellent person, they say; but she lives too far off. Tell Harry Scott to step up to the Rectory with a request from you that Caroline Helstone should come and spend the evening with you."

"Would it not be better to-morrow, dear brother?"

"I should like her to see the place as it is just now; its brilliant cleanliness and perfect neatness are so much to your credit."

"It might benefit her in the way of example."

"It might and must: she ought to come."

He went into the kitchen.

"Sarah, delay tea half-an-hour." He then commissioned her to despatch Harry Scott to the Rectory, giving her a twisted note hastily scribbled in pencil by himself, and addressed "Miss Helstone."

Scarcely had Sarah time to get impatient under the fear of damage to her toast already prepared, when the messenger returned; and with him the invited guest.

She entered through the kitchen, quietly tripped up Sarah's stairs to take off her bonnet and furs, and came down as quietly, with her beautiful curls nicely smoothed; her graceful merino dress and delicate collar all trim and spotless; her gay little work-bag in her hand. She lingered to exchange a few kindly words with Sarah; and to look at the new tortoise-shell kitten basking on the kitchen hearth; and to speak to the canary-bird, which a sudden blaze from the fire had startled on its perch; and then she betook herself to the parlour.

The gentle salutation, the friendly welcome, were interchanged in such tranquil sort as befitted cousins meeting; a sense of pleasure, subtle and quiet as a perfume, diffused itself through the room; the newly-

kindled lamp burnt up bright; the tray and the singing urn were brought in.

"I am pleased to come home," repeated Mr Moore.

They assembled round the table. Hortense chiefly talked. She congratulated Caroline on the evident improvement in her health: her colour and her plump cheeks were returning, she remarked. It was true. There was an obvious change in Miss Helstone: all about her seemed elastic; depression, fear, forlornness, were withdrawn: no longer crushed, and saddened, and slow, and drooping, she looked like one who had tasted the cordial of heart's ease, and been lifted on the wing of hope.

After tea, Hortense went upstairs: she had not rummaged her drawers for a month past, and the impulse to perform that operation was now become resistless. During her absence, the talk passed into Caroline's hands: she took it up with ease; she fell into her best tone of conversation. A pleasing facility and elegance of language gave fresh charm to familiar topics; a new music in the always soft voice gently surprised and pleasingly captivated the listener; unwonted shades and lights of expression elevated the young countenance with character, and kindled it with animation.

"Caroline, you look as if you had heard good tidings," said Moore, after earnestly gazing at her for some minutes.

"Do I?"

"I sent for you this evening that I might be cheered; but you cheer me more than I had calculated."

"I am glad of that. And I *really* cheer you?"

"You look brightly, move buoyantly, speak musically."

"It is pleasant to be here again."

"Truly it is pleasant; I feel it so. And to see health on your cheek, and hope in your eye, is pleasant,

Cary; but what is this hope, and what is the source of this sunshine I perceive about you?"

"For one thing, I am happy in mamma: I love her so much, and she loves me. Long and tenderly she nursed me; now, when her care has made me well, I can occupy myself for and with her all the day. I say it is my turn to attend to her; and I *do* attend to her: I am her waiting woman, as well as her child: I like —you would laugh if you knew what pleasure I have in making dresses and sewing for her. She looks so nice now, Robert: I will not let her be old-fashioned. And then, she is charming to talk to: full of wisdom; ripe in judgment; rich in information; exhaustless in stores her observant faculties have quietly amassed. Every day that I live with her, I like her better; I esteem her more highly; I love her more tenderly."

"*That* for one thing, then, Cary: you talk in such a way about 'mamma,' it is enough to make one jealous of the old lady."

"She is not old, Robert."

"Of the young lady, then."

"She does not pretend to be young."

"Well—of the matron. But you said, 'mamma's' affection was *one* thing that made you happy; now for the other thing."

"I am glad you are better."

"What besides?"

"I am glad we are friends."

"You and I?"

"Yes: I once thought we never should be."

"Cary, some day I mean to tell you a thing about myself that is not to my credit, and, consequently, will not please you."

"Ah!—don't! I cannot bear to think ill of you."

"And I cannot bear that you should think better of me than I deserve."

"Well, but I half know your 'thing:' indeed, I believe I know all about it."

"You do not."

"I believe I do."

"Whom does it concern besides me?"

She coloured; she hesitated; she was silent.

"Speak, Cary!—whom does it concern?"

She tried to utter a name and could not.

"Tell me: there is none present but ourselves; be frank."

"But if I guess wrong?"

"I will forgive. Whisper, Cary."

He bent his ear to her lips: still she would not, or could not, speak clearly to the point. Seeing that Moore waited, and was resolved to hear something, she at last said—"Miss Keeldar spent a day at the Rectory about a week since. The evening came on very wintry, and we persuaded her to stay all night."

"And you and she curled your hair together?"

"How do you know that?"

"And then you chatted; and she told you"——

"It was not at curling-hair time; so you are not as wise as you think: and besides, she didn't tell me."

"You slept together afterwards?"

"We occupied the same room and bed. We did not sleep much: we talked the whole night through."

"I'll be sworn you did! and then it all came out—tant pis. I would rather you had heard it from myself."

"You are quite wrong: she did not tell me what you suspect: she is not the person to proclaim such things; but yet I inferred some thing from parts of her discourse: I gathered more from rumour, and I made out the rest by instinct."

"But if she did not tell you that I wanted to marry her for the sake of her money, and that she refused me

indignantly and scornfully (you need neither start nor blush; nor yet need you prick your trembling fingers with your needle: that is the plain truth, whether you like it or not)—if such was not the subject of her august confidences, on what point did they turn? You say you talked the whole night through: what about?"

"About things we never thoroughly discussed before, intimate friends as we have been; but you hardly expect I should tell you?"

"Yes, yes, Cary—you will tell me: you said we were friends; and friends should always confide in each other."

"But are you sure you won't repeat it?"

"Quite sure."

"Not to Louis?"

"Not even to Louis? What does Louis care for young ladies' secrets?"

"Robert—Shirley is a curious, magnanimous being."

"I dare say: I can imagine there are both odd points and grand points about her."

"I have found her chary in showing her feelings; but when they rush out, river-like, and pass full and powerful before you—almost without leave from her—you gaze, wonder, you admire, and—I think—love her."

"You saw this spectacle?"

"Yes: at dead of night; when all the house was silent, and starlight, and the cold reflection from the snow glimmered in our chamber,—then I saw Shirley's heart."

"Her heart's core? Do you think she showed you that?"

"Her heart's core."

"And how was it?"

"Like a shrine,—for it was holy; like snow,—for

it was pure; like flame,—for it was warm; like death,—for it was strong."

"Can she love? Tell me that."

"What think you?"

"She has loved none that have loved her yet."

"Who are those that have loved her?"

He named a list of gentlemen, closing with Sir Philip Nunnely.

"She has loved none of these."

"Yet some of them were worthy of a woman's affection."

"Of some women's; but not of Shirley's."

"Is she better than others of her sex?"

"She is peculiar, and more dangerous to take as a wife—rashly."

"I can imagine that."

"She spoke of you"——

"Oh! she did! I thought you denied it."

"She did not speak in the way you fancy; but I asked her, and I would make her tell me what she thought of you, or rather, how she felt towards you. I wanted to know: I had long wanted to know."

"So had I; but let us hear: she thinks meanly—she feels contemptuously, doubtless?"

"She thinks of you almost as highly as a woman can think of a man. You know she can be eloquent: I yet feel in fancy the glow of the language in which her opinion was conveyed."

"But how does she feel?"

"Till you shocked her (she said you had shocked her, but she would not tell me how), she felt as a sister feels towards a brother of whom she is at once fond and proud."

"I'll shock her no more, Cary, for the shock rebounded on myself till I staggered again: but that comparison about sister and brother is all nonsense: she

is too rich and proud to entertain fraternal sentiments for me."

"You don't know her, Robert; and somehow, I fancy *now* (I had other ideas formerly), that you cannot know her: you and she are not so constructed as to be able thoroughly to understand each other."

"It may be so. I esteem her; I admire her; and yet my impressions concerning her are harsh—perhaps uncharitable. I believe, for instance, that she is incapable of love"——

"Shirley incapable of love!"

"That she will never marry: I imagine her jealous of compromising her pride, of relinquishing her power, of sharing her property."

"Shirley has hurt your amour-propre."

"She did hurt it—though I had not an emotion of tenderness, not a spark of passion for her."

"Then, Robert, it was very wicked in you to want to marry her."

"And very mean, my little pastor, my pretty priestess. I never wanted to kiss Miss Keeldar in my life, though she has fine lips, scarlet and round, as ripe cherries; or, if I did wish it, it was the mere desire of the eye."

"I doubt, now, whether you are speaking the truth: the grapes or the cherries are sour—'hung too high.'"

"She has a pretty figure, a pretty face, beautiful hair; I acknowledge all her charms and feel none of them; or only feel them in a way she would disdain. I suppose I was truly tempted, by the mere gilding of the bait. Caroline, what a noble fellow your Robert is—great, good, disinterested, and then so pure!"

"But not perfect: he made a great blunder once, and we will hear no more about it."

"And shall we think no more about it, Cary? Shall

we not despise him in our heart, gentle but just, compassionate but upright?"

"Never! We will remember that with what measure we mete it shall be measured unto us, and so we will give no scorn—only affection."

"Which won't satisfy, I warn you of that. Something besides affection—something far stronger, sweeter, warmer—will be demanded one day: is it there to give?"

Caroline was moved—much moved.

"Be calm, Lina," said Moore soothingly; "I have no intention, because I have no right, to perturb your mind now, nor for months to come: don't look as if you would leave me: we will make no more agitating allusions: we will resume our gossip. Do not tremble: look me in the face: see what a poor, pale, grim phantom I am—more pitiable than formidable."

She looked shyly. "There is something formidable still, pale as you are," she said, as her eye fell under his.

"To return to Shirley," pursued Moore; "is it your opinion that she is ever likely to marry?"

"She loves."

"Platonically—theoretically—all humbug!"

"She loves, what I call, sincerely."

"Did she say so?"

"I cannot affirm that she said so: no such confession as, I love this man or that, passed her lips."

"I thought not."

"But the feeling made its way in spite of her, and I saw it. She spoke of one man in a strain not to be misunderstood: her voice alone was sufficient testimony. Having wrung from her an opinion on your character, I demanded a second opinion of—another person about whom I had my conjectures; though they were the most tangled and puzzled conjectures in the world. I would *make* her speak: I shook her, I chid her, I

pinched her fingers when she tried to put me off with gibes and jests in her queer, provoking way, and at last, out it came: the voice, I say, was enough; hardly raised above a whisper, and yet such a soft vehemence in its tones. There was no confession—no confidence in the matter: to these things she cannot condescend; but I am sure that man's happiness is dear to her as her own life."

"Who is it?"

"I charged her with the fact; she did not deny; she did not avow, but looked at me: I saw her eyes by the snow-gleam. It was quite enough: I triumphed over her mercilessly."

"What right had *you* to triumph? Do you mean to say *you* are fancy-free?"

"Whatever *I* am, Shirley is a bondswoman. Lioness! she has found her captor. Mistress she may be of all round her—but her own mistress she is not."

"So you exulted at recognising a fellow-slave in one so fair and imperial?"

"I did; Robert, you say right, in one so fair and imperial."

"You confess it—a *fellow*-slave?"

"I confess nothing; but I say that haughty Shirley is no more free than was Hagar."

"And who, pray, is the Abraham; the hero of a patriarch who has achieved such a conquest?"

"You still speak scornfully, and cynically, and sorely; but I will make you change your note before I have done with you."

"We will see that: can she marry this Cupidon?"

"Cupidon! he is just about as much a Cupidon as you are a Cyclops."

"Can she marry him?"

"You will see."

"I want to know his name, Cary."

"Guess it."

"Is it any one in this neighbourhood?"

"Yes, in Briarfield parish."

"Then it is some person unworthy of her. I don't know a soul in Briarfield parish her equal."

"Guess."

"Impossible. I suppose she is under a delusion, and will plunge into some absurdity after all."

Caroline smiled.

"Do *you* approve the choice?" asked Moore.

"Quite, *quite*."

"Then I *am* puzzled; for the head which owns this bounteous fall of hazel curls is an excellent little thinking machine, most accurate in its working: it boasts a correct, steady judgment, inherited from 'mamma,' I suppose."

"And I *quite* approve, and mamma was charmed."

"'Mamma' charmed! Mrs Pryor. It can't be romantic then?"

"It *is* romantic, but it is also right."

"Tell me, Cary. Tell me out of pity: I am too weak to be tantalized."

"You shall be tantalized: it will do you no harm: you are not so weak as you pretend."

"I have twice this evening had some thought of falling on the floor at your feet."

"You had better not: I shall decline to help you up."

"And worshipping you downright. My mother was a Roman Catholic; you look like the loveliest of her pictures of the Virgin: I think I will embrace her faith, and kneel and adore."

"Robert, Robert, sit still; don't be absurd: I will go to Hortense, if you commit extravagances."

"You have stolen my senses: just now nothing will

come into my mind but 'les litanies de la sainte Vièrge. Rose céleste, reine des Anges!'"

"Tour d'ivoire, maison d'or:' is not that the jargon? Well, sit down quietly, and guess your riddle."

"But, 'mamma' charmed! There's the puzzle."

"I'll tell you what mamma said when I told her: 'Depend upon it, my dear, such a choice will make the happiness of Miss Keeldar's life.'"

"I'll guess once, and no more. It is old Helstone. She is going to be your aunt."

"I'll tell my uncle, I'll tell Shirley!" cried Caroline, laughing gleefully. "Guess again, Robert; your blunders are charming."

"It is the parson, Hall."

"Indeed, no: he is mine, if you please."

"Yours! Ay! the whole generation of women in Briarfield seem to have made an idol of that priest: I wonder why he is bald, sand-blind, grey-haired."

"Fanny will be here to fetch me, before you have solved the riddle, if you don't make haste."

"I'll guess no more, I am tired: and then I don't care. Miss Keeldar may marry 'le grand Turc' for me."

"Must I whisper?"

"That you must, and quickly: here comes Hortense; come near, a little nearer, my own Lina: I care for the whisper more than the words."

She whispered: Robert gave a start, a flash of the eye, a brief laugh: Miss Moore entered, and Sarah followed behind, with information that Fanny was come. The hour of converse was over.

Robert found a moment to exchange a few more whispered sentences: he was waiting at the foot of the staircase, as Caroline descended after putting on her shawl.

"Must I call Shirley a noble creature now?" he asked.

"If you wish to speak the truth, certainly."

"Must I forgive her?"

"Forgive her? Naughty Robert! Was she in the wrong, or were you?"

"Must I at length love her downright, Cary?"

Caroline looked keenly up, and made a movement towards him, something between the loving and the petulant.

"Only give the word, and I'll try to obey you."

"Indeed, you must not love her: the bare idea is perverse."

"But then she is handsome, peculiarly handsome: hers is a beauty that grows on you: you think her but graceful, when you first see her; you discover her to be beautiful when you have known her for a year."

"It is not you who are to say these things. Now, Robert, be good."

"O Cary, I have no love to give. Were the goddess of beauty to woo me, I could not meet her advances: there is no heart which I can call mine in this breast."

"So much the better: you are a great deal safer without: good-night."

"Why must you always go, Lina, at the very instant when I most want you to stay?"

"Because you most wish to retain when you are most certain to lose."

"Listen; one other word. Take care of your own heart: do you hear me?"

"There is no danger."

"I am not convinced of that: the Platonic parson, for instance."

"Who? Malone?"

"Cyril Hall: I owe more than one twinge of jealousy to that quarter."

"As to you, you have been flirting with Miss Mann: she showed me the other day a plant you had given her. —Fanny, I am ready."

Chapter xxxvj.

WRITTEN IN THE SCHOOLROOM.

LOUIS MOORE'S doubts, respecting the immediate evacuation of Fieldhead by Mr Sympson, turned out to be perfectly well founded. The very next day after the grand quarrel about Sir Philip Nunnely, a sort of reconciliation was patched up between uncle and niece: Shirley, who could never find it in her heart to be or to seem inhospitable (except in the single instance of Mr Donne), begged the whole party to stay a little longer: she begged in such earnest, it was evident she wished it for some reason. They took her at her word: indeed, the uncle could not bring himself to leave her quite unwatched—at full liberty to marry Robert Moore, as soon as that gentleman should be able (Mr Sympson piously prayed this might never be the case) to reassert his supposed pretensions to her hand. They all stayed.

In his first rage against all the house of Moore, Mr Sympson had so conducted himself towards Mr Louis, that that gentleman—patient of labour or suffering, but intolerant of coarse insolence—had promptly resigned his post, and could now be induced to resume and retain it only till such time as the family should quit Yorkshire: Mrs Sympson's entreaties prevailed with him thus far; his own attachment to his pupil constituted an additional motive for concession; and probably he

had a third motive, stronger than either of the other two: probably he would have found it very hard indeed to leave Fieldhead just now.

Things went on, for some time, pretty smoothly; Miss Keeldar's health was re-established; her spirits resumed their flow: Moore had found means to relieve her from every nervous apprehension; and, indeed, from the moment of giving him her confidence, every fear seemed to have taken wing: her heart became as lightsome, her manner as careless, as those of a little child, that, thoughtless of its own life or death, trusts all responsibility to its parents. He and William Farren —through whose medium he made inquiries concerning the state of Phœbe—agreed in asserting that the dog was not mad: that it was only ill-usage which had driven her from home: for it was proved that her master was in the frequent habit of chastising her violently. Their assertion might, or might not, be true: the groom and gamekeeper affirmed to the contrary; both asserting that, if hers was not a clear case of hydrophobia, there was no such disease. But to this evidence Louis Moore turned an incredulous ear: he reported to Shirley only what was encouraging: she believed him; and, right or wrong, it is certain that in her case the bite proved innocuous.

November passed; December came: the Sympsons were now really departing; it was incumbent on them to be at home by Christmas; their packages were preparing; they were to leave in a few days. One winter evening, during the last week of their stay, Louis Moore again took out his little blank book, and discoursed with it as follows:—

"She is lovelier than ever. Since that little cloud was dispelled, all the temporary waste and wanness have vanished. It was marvellous to see how soon the

magical energy of youth raised her elastic, and revived her blooming.

"After breakfast this morning, when I had seen her, and listened to her, and—so to speak—felt her, in every sentient atom of my frame, I passed from her sunny presence into the chill drawing-room. Taking up a little gilt volume, I found it to contain a selection of lyrics. I read a poem or two: whether the spell was in me or in the verse, I know not, but my heart filled genially—my pulse rose: I glowed, notwithstanding the frost air. I, too, am young as yet: though she said she never considered me young, I am barely thirty; there are moments when life—for no other reason than my own youth—beams with sweet hues upon me.

"It was time to go to the schoolroom: I went. That same schoolroom is rather pleasant in a morning; the sun then shines through the low lattice; the books are in order; there are no papers strewn about; the fire is clear and clean; no cinders have fallen, no ashes accumulated. I found Henry there, and he had brought with him Miss Keeldar: they were together.

"I said she was lovelier than ever: she is. A fine rose, not deep but delicate, opens on her cheek; her eye, always dark, clear, and speaking, utters now a language I cannot render—it is the utterance, seen not heard, through which angels must have communed when there was 'silence in heaven.' Her hair was always dusk as night, and fine as silk; her neck was always fair, flexible, polished—but both have now a new charm: the tresses are soft as shadow, the shoulders they fall on wear a goddess-grace. Once I only *saw* her beauty, now I *feel* it.

"Henry was repeating his lesson to her before bringing it to me—one of her hands was occupied with the book, he held the other: that boy gets more than his share of privileges; he dares caress and is caressed.

What indulgence and compassion she shows him! Too much: if this went on, Henry, in a few years, when his soul was formed, would offer it on her altar, as I have offered mine.

"I saw her eyelid flitter when I came in, but she did not look up: *now* she hardly ever gives me a glance. She seems to grow silent too—to *me* she rarely speaks, and, when I am present, she says little to others. In my gloomy moments, I attribute this change to indifference, —aversion,—what not? In my sunny intervals I give it another meaning. I say, were I her equal, I could find in this shyness—coyness, and in that coyness—love. As it is, dare I look for it? What could I do with it, if found?

"This morning I dared, at least, contrive an hour's communion for her and me; I dared not only *wish*—but *will* an interview with her: I dared summon solitude to guard us. Very decidedly I called Henry to the door; without hesitation, I said, 'Go where you will, my boy, but, till I call you, return not here.'

"Henry, I could see, did not like his dismissal: that boy is young, but a thinker; his meditative eye shines on me strangely sometimes: he half feels what links me to Shirley; he half guesses that there is a dearer delight in the reserve with which I am treated, than in all the endearments he is allowed. The young, lame, half-grown lion would growl at me now and then, because I have tamed his lioness and am her keeper, did not the habit of discipline and the instinct of affection hold him subdued. Go, Henry; you must learn to take your share of the bitter of life with all of Adam's race that have gone before, or will come after you; your destiny can be no exception to the common lot: be grateful that your love is overlooked thus early, before it can claim any affinity to passion: an hour's fret, a pang of envy, suffice to express what you feel: Jealousy, hot as

the sun above the line, Rage, destructive as the tropic storm, the clime of your sensations ignores—as yet.

"I took my usual seat at the desk, quite in my usual way: I am blessed in that power to cover all inward ebullition with outward calm. No one who looks at my slow face can guess the vortex sometimes whirling in my heart, and engulfing thought, and wrecking prudence. Pleasant is it to have the gift to proceed peacefully and powerfully in your course without alarming by one eccentric movement. It was not my present intention to utter one word of love to her, or to reveal one glimpse of the fire in which I wasted. Presumptuous, I never have been; presumptuous, I never will be: rather than even *seem* selfish and interested, I would resolutely rise, gird my loins, part and leave her, and seek, on the other side of the globe, a new life, cold and barren as the rock the salt tide daily washes. My design this morning was to take of her a near scrutiny—to read a line in the page of her heart: before I left I determined to know *what* I was leaving.

"I had some quills to make into pens: most men's hands would have trembled when their hearts were so stirred; mine went to work steadily, and my voice, when I called it into exercise, was firm.

"'This day week you will be alone at Fieldhead, Miss Keeldar.'

"'Yes: I rather think my uncle's intention to go is a settled one now.'

"'He leaves you dissatisfied.'

"'He is not pleased with me.'

"'He departs as he came—no better for his journey: this is mortifying.'

"'I trust the failure of his plans will take from him all inclination to lay new ones.'

"'In his way, Mr Sympson honestly wished you

well. All he has done, or intended to do, he believed to be for the best.'

"'You are kind to undertake the defence of a man who has permitted himself to treat you with so much insolence.'

"'I never feel shocked at, or bear malice for, what is spoken in character; and most perfectly in character was that vulgar and violent onset against me, when he had quitted you worsted.'

"'You cease now to be Henry's tutor?'

"'I shall be parted from Henry for a while—(if he and I live we shall meet again somehow, for we love each other)—and be ousted from the bosom of the Sympson family for ever. Happily this change does not leave me stranded: it but hurries into premature execution designs long formed.'

"'No change finds you off your guard: I was sure, in your calm way, you would be prepared for sudden mutation. I always think you stand in the world like a solitary but watchful, thoughtful archer in a wood; and the quiver on your shoulder holds more arrows than one; your bow is provided with a second string. Such too is your brother's wont. You two might go forth homeless hunters to the loneliest western wilds; all would be well with you. The hewn tree would make you a hut, the cleared forest yield you fields from its stripped bosom, the buffalo would feel your rifle-shot, and with lowered horns and hump pay homage at your feet.'

"'And any Indian tribe of Black-feet, or Flat-heads, would afford us a bride, perhaps?'

"'No' (hesitatingly): 'I think not. The savage is sordid: I think,—that is, I *hope*,—you would neither of you share your hearth with that to which you could not give your heart.'

"'What suggested the wild West to your mind, Miss

Keeldar? Have you been with me in spirit when I did not see you? Have you entered into my day-dreams, and beheld my brain labouring at its scheme of a future?'

"She had separated a slip of paper for lighting tapers —a spill, as it is called—into fragments: she threw morsel by morsel into the fire, and stood pensively watching them consume. She did not speak.

"'How did you learn what you seem to know about my intentions?'

"'I know nothing: I am only discovering them now: I spoke at hazard.'

"'Your hazard sounds like divination. A tutor I will never be again; never take a pupil after Henry and yourself: not again will I sit habitually at another man's table—no more be the appendage of a family. I am now a man of thirty: I have never been free since I was a boy of ten. I have such a thirst for freedom—such a deep passion to know her and call her mine—such a day-desire and night-longing to win her and possess her, I will not refuse to cross the Atlantic for her sake: her I will follow deep into virgin woods. Mine it shall not be to accept a savage girl as a slave—she could not be a wife. I know no white woman whom I love that would accompany me; but I am certain Liberty will await me, sitting under a pine: when I call her she will come to my loghouse, and she shall fill my arms.'

"She could not hear me speak so unmoved, and she *was* moved. It was right—I meant to move her. She could not answer me, nor could she look at me: I should have been sorry if she could have done either. Her cheek glowed as if a crimson flower, through whose petals the sun shone, had cast its light upon it. On the white lid and dark lashes of her downcast eye, trembled

all that is graceful in the sense of half-painful, half-pleasing shame.

"Soon she controlled her emotion, and took all her feelings under command. I saw she had felt insurrection, and was waking to empire—she sat down. There was that in her face which I could read: it said, I see the line which is my limit—nothing shall make me pass it. I feel—I know how far I may reveal my feelings, and when I must clasp the volume. I have advanced to a certain distance, as far as the true and sovereign and undegraded nature of my kind permits—now here I stand rooted. My heart may break if it is baffled: let it break—it shall never dishonour me—it shall never dishonour my sisterhood in me. Suffering before degradation! death before treachery!

"I, for my part, said, 'If she were poor, I would be at her feet. If she were lowly, I would take her in my arms. Her Gold and her Station are two griffins, that guard her on each side. Love looks and longs, and dares not: Passion hovers round, and is kept at bay: Truth and Devotion are scared. There is nothing to lose in winning her—no sacrifice to make—it is all clear gain, and therefore unimaginably difficult.'

"Difficult or not, something must be done; something must be said. I could not, and would not, sit silent with all that beauty modestly mute in my presence. I spoke thus; and still I spoke with calm: quiet as my words were, I could hear they fell in a tone distinct, round, and deep.

"'Still, I know I shall be strangely placed with that mountain nymph, Liberty. She is, I suspect, akin to that Solitude which I once wooed, and from which I now seek a divorce. These Oreads are peculiar: they come upon you with an unearthly charm, like some starlight evening; they inspire a wild but not warm delight; their beauty is the beauty of spirits: their grace is not

the grace of life, but of seasons or scenes in nature: theirs is the dewy bloom of morning—the languid flush of evening—the peace of the moon—the changefulness of clouds. I want and will have something different. This elfish splendour looks chill to my vision, and feels frozen to my touch. I am not a poet: I cannot live on abstractions. You, Miss Keeldar, have sometimes, in your laughing satire, called me a material philosopher, and implied that I live sufficiently for the substantial. Certainly I feel material from head to foot; and glorious as Nature is, and deeply as I worship her with the solid powers of a solid heart, I would rather behold her through the soft human eyes of a loved and lovely wife, than through the wild orbs of the highest goddess of Olympus.'

"'Juno could not cook a buffalo steak as you like it,' said she.

"'She could not: but I will tell you who could—some young, penniless, friendless orphan-girl. I wish I could find such a one: pretty enough for me to love, with something of the mind and heart suited to my taste: not uneducated—honest and modest. I care nothing for attainments; but I would fain have the germ of those sweet natural powers which nothing acquired can rival; any temper Fate wills,—I can manage the hottest. To such a creature as this, I should like to be first tutor and then husband. I would teach her my language, my habits, and my principles, and then I would reward her with my love.'

"'*Reward* her! lord of the creation! *Reward* her!' ejaculated she, with a curled lip.

"'And be repaid a thousandfold.'

"'If she willed it, Monseigneur.'

"'And she *should* will it.'

"'You have stipulated for any temper Fate wills.

Compulsion is flint and a blow to the metal of some souls.'

"'And love the spark it elicits.'

"'Who cares for the love that is but a spark—seen, flown upward, and gone?'

"'I must find my orphan-girl. Tell me how, Miss Keeldar.'

"'Advertise; and be sure you add, when you describe the qualifications, she must be a good plain cook.'

"'I must find her; and when I do find her, I shall marry her.'

"'Not you!' and her voice took a sudden accent of peculiar scorn.

"I liked this: I had roused her from the pensive mood in which I had first found her: I would stir her further.

"'Why doubt it?'

"'*You* marry!'

"'Yes,—of course: nothing more evident than that I can, and shall.'

"'The contrary is evident, Mr Moore.'

"She charmed me in this mood: waxing disdainful, half insulting, pride, temper, derision, blent in her large fine eye, that had, just now, the look of a merlin's.

"'Favour me with your reasons for such an opinion, Miss Keeldar.'

"'How will *you* manage to marry, I wonder?'

"'I shall manage it with ease and speed when I find the proper person.'

"'Accept celibacy!' (and she made a gesture with her hand as if she gave me something) 'take it as your doom!'

"'No: you cannot give what I already have. Celibacy has been mine for thirty years. If you wish

"'You might have the satisfaction of leading him to a higher standard—of improving his tastes.'

"'Leading and improving! teaching and tutoring! bearing and forbearing! Pah! My husband is not to be my baby. I am not to set him his daily lesson and see that he learns it, and give him a sugar-plum if he is good, and a patient, pensive, pathetic lecture if he is bad. But it is like a tutor to talk of the "satisfaction of teaching."—I suppose *you* think it the finest employment in the world. I don't—I reject it. Improving a husband! No. I shall insist upon my husband improving me, or else we part.'

"'God knows it is needed!'

"'What do you mean by that, Mr Moore?'

"'What I say. Improvement is imperatively needed.'

"'If you were a woman you would school Monsieur, votre mari, charmingly: it would just suit you; schooling is your vocation.'

"'May I ask, whether, in your present just and gentle mood, you mean to taunt me with being a tutor?'

"'Yes—bitterly; and with anything else you please: any defect of which you are painfully conscious.'

"'With being poor, for instance?'

"'Of course; that will sting you; you are sore about your poverty: you brood over that.'

"'With having nothing but a very plain person to offer the woman who may master my heart?'

"'Exactly. You have a habit of calling yourself plain. You are sensitive about the cut of your features, because they are not quite on an Apollo-pattern. You abuse them more than is needful, in the faint hope that others may say a word in their behalf—which won't happen. Your face is nothing to boast of, certainly: not a pretty line, nor a pretty tint, to be found therein.'

"'Compare it with your own.'

"'It looks like a god of Egypt: a great sand-buried stone head; or rather I will compare it to nothing so lofty: it looks like Tartar: you are my mastiff's cousin: I think you as much like him as a man can be like a dog.'

"'Tartar is your dear companion. In summer, when you rise early, and run out into the fields to wet your feet with the dew, and freshen your cheek and uncurl your hair with the breeze, you always call him to follow you: you call him sometimes with a whistle that you learned from me. In the solitude of your wood, when you think nobody but Tartar is listening, you whistle the very tunes you imitated from my lips, or sing the very songs you have caught up by ear from my voice; I do not ask whence flows the feeling which you pour into these songs, for I know it flows out of your heart, Miss Keeldar. In the winter evenings, Tartar lies at your feet: you suffer him to rest his head on your perfumed lap; you let him couch on the borders of your satin raiment: his rough hide is familiar with the contact of your hand; I once saw you kiss him on that snow-white beauty-spot which stars his broad forehead. It is dangerous to say I am like Tartar; it suggests to me a claim to be treated like Tartar.'

"'Perhaps, sir, you can extort as much from your penniless and friendless young orphan-girl, when you find her.'

"'Oh! could I find her such as I image her. Something to tame first, and teach afterwards: to break in and then to fondle. To lift the destitute proud thing out of poverty; to establish power over, and then to be indulgent to the capricious moods that never were influenced and never indulged before; to see her alternately irritated and subdued about twelve times in the twenty-four hours; and perhaps, eventually,

when her training was accomplished, to behold her the exemplary and patient mother of about a dozen children, only now and then lending little Louis a cordial cuff by way of paying the interest of the vast debt she owes his father. Oh!' (I went on), 'my orphan-girl would give me many a kiss; she would watch on the threshold for my coming home of an evening; she would run into my arms; should keep my hearth as bright as she would make it warm. God bless the sweet idea! Find her I must.'

"Her eyes emitted an eager flash, her lips opened; but she reclosed them, and impetuously turned away.

"'Tell me, tell me where she is, Miss Keeldar!'

"Another movement: all haughtiness, and fire, and impulse.

"'I must know. You *can* tell me. You *shall* tell me.'

"'I *never will.*'

"She turned to leave me. Could I now let her part as she had always parted from me? No: I had gone too far not to finish. I had come too near the end not to drive home to it. All the encumbrance of doubt, all the rubbish of indecision must be removed at once, and the plain truth must be ascertained. She must take her part, and tell me what it was. I must take mine and adhere to it.

"'A minute, madam,' I said, keeping my hand on the door-handle before I opened it. 'We have had a long conversation this morning, but the last word has not been spoken yet: it is yours to speak it.'

"'May I pass?'

"'No. I guard the door. I would almost rather die than let you leave me just now, without speaking the word I demand.'

"'What dare you expect me to say?'

"'What I am dying and perishing to hear; what

I *must* and *will* hear; what you dare not now suppress.'

"'Mr Moore, I hardly know what you mean: you are not like yourself.'

"I suppose I hardly was like my usual self, for I scared her; that I could see: it was right; she must be scared to be won.

"'You *do* know what I mean, and for the first time I stand before you *myself*. I have flung off the tutor, and beg to introduce you to the man: and remember, he is a gentleman.'

"She trembled. She put her hand to mine as if to remove it from the lock; she might as well have tried to loosen, by her soft touch, metal welded to metal. She felt she was powerless, and receded; and again she trembled.

"What change I underwent I cannot explain; but out of her emotion passed into me a new spirit. I neither was crushed nor elated by her lands and gold; I thought not of them, cared not for them: they were nothing: dross that could not dismay me. I saw only herself; her young beautiful form; the grace, the majesty, the modesty of her girlhood.

"'My pupil,' I said.

"'My master,' was the low answer.

"'I have a thing to tell you.'

"She waited with declined brow, and ringlets drooped.

"'I have to tell you, that for four years you have been growing into your tutor's heart, and that you are rooted there now. I have to declare that you have bewitched me, in spite of sense and experience, and difference of station and estate: you have so looked, and spoken, and moved; so shown me your faults and your virtues—beauties rather; they are hardly so stern

as virtues—that I love you—love you with my life and strength. It is out now.'

"She sought what to say, but could not find a word: she tried to rally, but vainly. I passionately repeated that I loved her.

"'Well, Mr Moore, what then?' was the answer I got, uttered in a tone that would have been petulant if it had not faltered.

"'Have you nothing to say to me: Have you no love for me?'

"'A little bit.'

"'I am not to be tortured: I will not even play at present.'

"'I don't want to play; I want to go.'

"'I wonder you dare speak of going at this moment. *You* go! What! with my heart in your hand, to lay it on your toilet and pierce it with your pins! From my presence you do not stir; out of my reach you do not stray, till I receive a hostage—pledge for pledge—your heart for mine.'

"'The thing you want is mislaid—lost sometime since: let me go and seek it.'

"'Declare that it is where your keys often are—in my possession.'

"'You ought to know. And where are my keys, Mr Moore? indeed and truly, I have lost them again; and Mrs Gill wants some money, and I have none, except this sixpence.'

"She took the coin out of her apron-pocket, and showed it in her palm. I could have trifled with her; but it would not do: life and death were at stake. Mastering at once the sixpence, and the hand that held it, I demanded—'Am I to die without you, or am I to live for you?'

"'Do as you please: far be it from me to dictate your choice.'

"'You shall tell me with your own lips, whether you doom me to exile, or call me to hope.'

"'Go. I can bear to be left.'

"'Perhaps, I too *can* bear to leave you: but reply, Shirley, my pupil, my sovereign—reply.'

"'Die without me if you will. Live for me if you dare.'

"'I am not afraid of you, my leopardess: I *dare* live for and with you, from this hour till my death. Now, then, I have you: you are mine: I will never let you go. Wherever my home be, I have chosen my wife. If I stay in England, in England you will stay; if I cross the Atlantic, you will cross it also: our lives are riveted; our lots intertwined.'

"'And are we equal then, sir? Are we equal at last?'

"'You are younger, frailer, feebler, more ignorant than I.'

"'Will you be good to me, and never tyrannise?'

"'Will you let me breathe, and not bewilder me? You must not smile at present. The world swims and changes round me. The sun is a dizzying scarlet blaze, the sky a violet vortex whirling over me.'

"I am a strong man, but I staggered as I spoke. All creation was exaggerated: colour grew more vivid: motion more rapid; life itself more vital. I hardly saw her for a moment; but I heard her voice—pitilessly sweet. She would not subdue one of her charms in compassion: perhaps she did not know what I felt.

"'You name me leopardess: remember, the leopardess is tameless,' said she.

"'Tame or fierce, wild or subdued, you are *mine*.'

"'I am glad I know my keeper, and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose.'

"I took her back to her seat, and sat down by her

side: I wanted to hear her speak again: I could never have enough of her voice and her words.

"'How much do you love me?' I asked.

"'Ah! you know: I will not gratify you: I will not flatter.'

"'I don't know half enough: my heart craves to be fed. If you knew how hungry and ferocious it is, you would hasten to stay it with a kind word or two.'

"'Poor Tartar!' said she, touching and patting my hand: 'poor fellow; stalwart friend; Shirley's pet and favourite, lie down!'

"'But I will not lie down till I am fed with one sweet word.'

"And at last she gave it.

"'Dear Louis, be faithful to me: never leave me. I don't care for life, unless I may pass it at your side.'

"'Something more.'

"She gave me a change: it was not her way to offer the same dish twice.

"'Sir!' she said, starting up, 'at your peril you ever again name such sordid things as money, or poverty, or inequality. It will be absolutely dangerous to torment me with these maddening scruples. I defy you to do it.'

"My face grew hot. I did once more wish I were not so poor, or she were not so rich. She saw the transient misery; and then, indeed, she caressed me. Blent with torment, I experienced rapture.

"'Mr Moore,' said she, looking up with a sweet, open, earnest countenance, 'teach me and help me to be good. I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of property; but I ask you to share the burden, and to show me how to sustain my part well. Your judgment is well balanced; your heart is kind; your principles are sound. I know you are wise; I feel you are benevolent; I believe you are conscientious. Be my companion

through life; be my guide where I am ignorant: be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!'

"'So help me God, I will!'"

Yet again, a passage from the blank book, if you like, reader; if you don't like it, pass it over:—

"The Sympsons are gone; but not before discovery and explanation. My manner must have betrayed something, or my looks: I was quiet, but I forgot to be guarded sometimes. I stayed longer in the room than usual; I could not bear to be out of her presence; I returned to it, and basked in it, like Tartar in the sun. If she left the oak-parlour, instinctively I rose, and left it too. She chid me for this procedure more than once: I did it with a vague, blundering idea of getting a word with her in the hall or elsewhere. Yesterday towards dusk, I had her to myself for five minutes, by the hall-fire: we stood side by side; she was railing at me, and I was enjoying the sound of her voice: the young ladies passed, and looked at us; we did not separate: ere long, they repassed, and again looked. Mrs Sympson came; we did not move: Mr Sympson opened the dining-room door; Shirley flashed him back full payment for his spying gaze: she curled her lip, and tossed her tresses. The glance she gave was at once explanatory and defiant; it said—'I like Mr Moore's society, and I dare you to find fault with my taste.'

"I asked, 'Do you mean him to understand how matters are?'

"'I do,' said she; 'but I leave the development to chance. There will be a scene. I neither invite it nor fear it—only, you must be present; for I am inexpressibly tired of facing him solus. I don't like to see him in a rage; he then puts off all his fine proprieties and conventional disguises, and the real human

being below is what you would call "commun, plat, bas—vilain et un peu méchant." His ideas are not clean, Mr Moore; they want scouring with soft soap and fuller's earth. I think, if he could add his imagination to the contents of Mrs Gill's bucking-basket, and let her boil it in her copper, with rain-water and bleaching-powder (I hope you think me a tolerable laundress), it would do him incalculable good.'

"This morning, fancying I heard her descend somewhat early, I was down instantly. I had not been deceived: there she was, busy at work in the breakfast-parlour, of which the housemaid was completing the arrangement and dusting. She had risen betimes to finish some little keepsake she intended for Henry. I got only a cool reception; which I accepted till the girl was gone, taking my book to the window-seat very quietly. Even when we were alone, I was slow to disturb her: to sit with her in sight was happiness, and the proper happiness, for early morning—serene, incomplete, but progressive. Had I been obtrusive, I knew I should have encountered rebuff. 'Not at home to suitors,' was written on her brow; therefore, I read on—stole, now and then, a look; watched her countenance soften and open, and she felt I respected her mood, and enjoyed the gentle content of the moment.

"The distance between us shrank, and the light hoar-frost thawed insensibly: ere an hour elapsed, I was at her side, watching her sew, gathering her sweet smiles and her merry words, which fell for me abundantly. We sat, as we had a right to sit, side by side: my arm rested on her chair; I was near enough to count the stitches of her work, and to discern the eye of her needle. The door suddenly opened.

"I believe, if I had just then started from her, she would have despised me: thanks to the phlegm of my nature, I rarely start. When I am well off, bien, com-

fortable, I am not soon stirred: bien I was—très bien —consequently, immutable: no muscle moved. I hardly looked to the door.

"'Good morning, uncle,' said she, addressing that personage; who paused on the threshold in a state of petrifaction.

"'Have you been long downstairs, Miss Keeldar, and alone with Mr Moore?'

"'Yes, a very long time: we both came down early; it was scarcely light.'

"'The proceeding is improper'——

"'It was at first: I was rather cross, and not civil; but you will perceive that we are now friends.'

"'I perceive more than you would wish me to perceive.'

"'Hardly, sir,' said I: 'we have no disguises. Will you permit me to intimate, that any further observations you have to make may as well be addressed to me. Henceforward, I stand between Miss Keeldar and all annoyance.'

"'*You!* What have *you* to do with Miss Keeldar?"

"'To protect, watch over, serve her.'

"'You, sir?—you, the tutor?"

"'Not one word of insult, sir,' interposed she: 'not one syllable of disrespect to Mr Moore, in this house.'

"'Do you take his part?'

"'*His* part? Oh, yes!'

"She turned to me with a sudden, fond movement, which I met by circling her with my arm. She and I both rose.

"'Good Ged!' was the cry from the morning-gown standing quivering at the door. *Ged*, I think, must be the cognomen of Mr Sympson's Lares: when hard pressed, he always invokes this idol.

"'Come forward, uncle: you shall hear all. Tell him all, Louis.'

"'I dare him to speak! The beggar! the knave! the specious hypocrite! the vile, insinuating, infamous menial! Stand apart from my niece, sir: let her go!'

"She clung to me with energy. 'I am near my future husband,' she said: 'who dares touch him or me?'

"'Her husband!' he raised and spread his hands: he dropped into a seat.

"'A while ago, you wanted much to know whom I meant to marry: my intention was then formed, but not mature for communication; now it is ripe, sun-mellowed, perfect: take the crimson-peach — take Louis Moore!'

"'But' (savagely) 'you *shall not* have him—he *shall not* have you.'

"'I would die before I would have another. I would die if I might not have him.'

"He uttered words with which this page shall never be polluted.

"She turned white as death: she shook all over: she lost her strength. I laid her down on the sofa: just looked to ascertain that she had not fainted—of which, with a divine smile, she assured me; I kissed her, and then, if I were to perish, I cannot give a clear account of what happened in the course of the next five minutes: she has since—through tears, laughter, and trembling—told me that I turned terrible, and gave myself to the demon; she says I left her, made one bound across the room—that Mr Sympson vanished through the door as if shot from a cannon—I also vanished, and she heard Mrs Gill scream.

Mrs Gill was still screaming when I came to my senses; I was then in another apartment—the oak-parlour, I think: I held Sympson before me crushed into a chair, and my hand was on his cravat: his eyes rolled in his head—I was strangling him, I think: the

"Her husband" he raised & spread his hands.

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housekeeper stood wringing her hands, entreating me to desist; I desisted that moment, and felt at once as cool as stone. But I told Mrs Gill to fetch the Red-House Inn chaise instantly, and informed Mr Sympson he must depart from Fieldhead the instant it came: though half frightened out of his wits, he declared he would not. Repeating the former order, I added a commission to fetch a constable. I said—'you *shall* go—by fair means or foul.'

"He threatened prosecution—I cared for nothing: I had stood over him once before, not quite so fiercely as now, but full as austerely. It was one night when burglars attempted the house at Sympson Grove; and in his wretched cowardice he would have given a vain alarm, without daring to offer defence: I had then been obliged to protect his family and his abode by mastering himself—and I had succeeded. I now remained with him till the chaise came: I marshalled him to it, he scolding all the way. He was terribly bewildered, as well as enraged; he would have resisted me, but knew not how: he called for his wife and daughters to come. I said they should follow him as soon as they could prepare: the smoke, the fume, the fret of his demeanour was inexpressible, but it was a fury incapable of producing a deed: that man, properly handled, must ever remain impotent. I know he will never touch me with the law: I know his wife, over whom he tyrannises in trifles, guides him in matters of importance. I have long since earned her undying mother's gratitude by my devotion to her boy: in some of Henry's ailments I have nursed him—better, she said, than any woman could nurse: she will never forget that. She and her daughters quitted me to-day, in mute wrath and consternation—but she respects me. When Henry clung to my neck, as I lifted him into the carriage and placed him by her side—when I arranged her own wrapping

to make her warm, though she turned her head from me, I saw the tears start to her eyes. She will but the more zealously advocate my cause, because she has left me in anger. I am glad of this: not for my own sake, but for that of my life and idol—my Shirley."

Once again he writes—a week after:—"I am now at Stilbro': I have taken up my temporary abode with a friend—a professional man—in whose business I can be useful. Every day I ride over to Fieldhead. How long will it be before I can call that place my home, and its mistress mine? I am not easy—not tranquil: I am tantalised—sometimes tortured. To see her now, one would think she had never pressed her cheek to my shoulder, or clung to me with tenderness or trust. I feel unsafe: she renders me miserable: I am shunned when I visit her: she withdraws from my reach. Once, this day, I lifted her face, resolved to get a full look down her deep, dark eyes: difficult to describe what I read there! Pantheress!—beautiful forest-born!—wily, tameless, peerless nature! She gnaws her chain: I see the white teeth working at the steel! She has dreams of her wild woods, and pinings after virgin freedom. I wish Sympson would come again, and oblige her again to entwine her arms about me. I wish there was danger she should lose me, as there is risk I shall lose her. No: final loss I do not fear; but long delay——

"It is now night—midnight. I have spent the afternoon and evening at Fieldhead. Some hours ago she passed me, coming down the oak-staircase to the hall: she did not know I was standing in the twilight, near the staircase-window, looking at the frost-bright constellations. How closely she glided against the banisters! How shyly shone her large eyes upon me! How evanescent, fugitive, fitful, she looked,—slim and swift as a Northern Streamer!

"I followed her into the drawing-room: Mrs Pryor and Caroline Helstone were both there; she has summoned them to bear her company awhile. In her white evening dress; with her long hair flowing full and wavy; with her noiseless step, her pale cheek, her eye full of night and lightning, she looked, I thought, spirit-like,—a thing made of an element,—the child of a breeze and a flame,—the daughter of ray and rain-drop,—a thing never to be overtaken, arrested, fixed. I wished I could avoid following her with my gaze, as she moved here and there, but it was impossible. I talked with the other ladies as well as I could, but still I looked at her. She was very silent: I think she never spoke to me,—not even when she offered me tea. It happened that she was called out a minute by Mrs Gill. I passed into the moon-lit hall, with the design of getting a word as she returned; nor in this did I fail.

"'Miss Keeldar, stay one instant!' said I, meeting her.

"'Why?—the hall is too cold.'

"'It is not cold for me: at my side, it should not be cold for you.'

"'But I shiver.'

"'With fear, I believe. What makes you fear me? You are quiet and distant: why?'

"'I may well fear what looks like a great dark goblin meeting me in the moonlight.'

"'*Do not—do not* pass!—stay with me awhile: let us exchange a few quiet words. It is three days since I spoke to you alone: such changes are cruel.'

"'I have no wish to be cruel,' she responded, softly enough; indeed, there was softness in her whole deportment—in her face, in her voice: but there was also reserve, and an air fleeting, evanishing, intangible.

"'You certainly give me pain,' said I. 'It is hardly a week since you called me your future husband, and

treated me as such; now I am once more the tutor for you: I am addressed as Mr Moore, and Sir; your lips have forgotten Louis.'

"'No, Louis, no: it is an easy, liquid name; not soon forgotten.'

"'Be cordial to Louis, then: approach him—let him approach.'

"'I *am* cordial,' said she, hovering aloof like a white shadow.

"'Your voice is very sweet and very low,' I answered, quietly advancing: 'you seem subdued, but still startled.'

"'No—quite calm, and afraid of nothing,' she assured me.

"'Of nothing but your votary.'

"I bent a knee to the flags at her feet.

"'You see I am in a new world, Mr Moore. I don't know myself,—I don't know you: but rise; when you do so, I feel troubled and disturbed.'

"I obeyed; it would not have suited me to retain that attitude long. I courted serenity and confidence for her, and not vainly: she trusted, and clung to me again.

"'Now, Shirley,' I said, 'you can conceive I am far from happy in my present uncertain, unsettled state.'

"'Oh, yes; you *are* happy!' she cried hastily: 'you don't know how happy you are!—any change will be for the worse!'"

"'Happy or not, I cannot bear to go on so much longer: you are too generous to require it.'

"'Be reasonable, Louis,—be patient! I like you because you are patient.'

"'Like me no longer, then,—love me instead: fix our marriage-day. Think of it to-night, and decide.'

"She breathed a murmur, inarticulate yet expressive: darted, or melted, from my arms—and I lost her."

Chapter xxxvij.

THE WINDING-UP.

YES, reader, we must settle accounts now. I have only briefly to narrate the final fates of some of the personages whose acquaintance we have made in this narrative, and then you and I must shake hands, and for the present separate.

Let us turn to the Curates,—to the much-loved, though long-neglected. Come forward, modest merit! Malone, I see, promptly answers the invocation: he knows his own description when he hears it.

No, Peter Augustus, we can have nothing to say to you: it won't do. Impossible to trust ourselves with the touching tale of your deeds and destinies. Are you not aware, Peter, that a discriminating public has its crotchets: that the unvarnished truth does not answer; that plain facts will not digest? Do you not know that the squeak of the real pig is no more relished now than it was in days of yore? Were I to give the catastrophe of your life and conversation, the public would sweep off in shrieking hysterics, and there would be a wild cry for sal-volatile and burnt feathers. "Impossible!" would be pronounced here: "untrue!" would be responded there. "Inartistic!" would be solemnly decided. Note well! Whenever you present the actual, simple truth, it is, somehow, always denounced as a lie: they disown it, cast it off, throw it on the parish; whereas the product of your own imagination, the mere figment, the sheer fiction, is adopted, petted, termed pretty, proper, sweetly natural: the little spurious wretch gets all the comfits,—the honest, lawful bantling all the cuffs. Such is the way of the world, Peter; and, as you are the legitimate urchin, rude, unwashed, and naughty, you must stand down.

Make way for Mr Sweeting.

Here he comes, with his lady on his arm; the most splendid and the weightiest woman in Yorkshire: Mrs Sweeting, formerly Miss Dora Sykes. They were married under the happiest auspices; Mr Sweeting having been just inducted to a comfortable living, and Mr Sykes being in circumstances to give Dora a handsome portion. They lived long and happily together, beloved by their parishioners and by a numerous circle of friends.

There! I think the varnish has been put on very nicely.

Advance, Mr Donne.

This gentleman turned out admirably: far better than either you or I could possibly have expected, reader. He, too, married a most sensible, quiet, lady-like little woman: the match was the making of him: he became an exemplary domestic character, and a truly active parish-priest (as a pastor, he, to his dying day, conscientiously refused to act). The outside of the cup and platter he burnished up with the best polishing-powder; the furniture of the altar and temple he looked after with the zeal of an upholsterer—the care of a cabinet-maker. His little school, his little church, his little parsonage, all owed their erection to him; and they did him credit: each was a model in its way: if uniformity and taste in architecture had been the same thing as consistency and earnestness in religion, what a shepherd of a Christian flock Mr Donne would have made! There was one art in the mastery of which nothing mortal ever surpassed Mr Donne—it was that of begging. By his own unassisted efforts, he begged all the money for all his erections. In this matter he had a grasp of plan, a scope of action quite unique: he begged of high and low—of the shoeless cottage-brat and the coroneted duke: he sent out begging-letters far

and wide—to old Queen Charlotte, to the princesses her daughters, to her sons the royal dukes, to the Prince Regent, to Lord Castlereagh, to every member of the Ministry then in office; and, what is more remarkable, he screwed something out of every one of these personages. It is on record that he got five pounds from the close-fisted old lady, Queen Charlotte, and two guineas from the royal profligate, her eldest son. When Mr Donne set out on begging expeditions, he armed himself in a complete suit of brazen mail: that you had given a hundred pounds yesterday, was, with him, no reason why you should not give two hundred to-day: he would tell you so to your face, and, ten to one, get the money out of you: people gave to get rid of him. After all, he did some good with the cash; he was useful in his day and generation.

Perhaps I ought to remark, that on the premature and sudden vanishing of Mr Malone from the stage of Briarfield parish (you cannot know how it happened, reader; your curiosity must be robbed to pay your elegant love of the pretty and pleasing), there came as his successor another Irish curate, Mr Macarthey. I am happy to be able to inform you, *with truth*, that this gentleman did as much credit to his country as Malone had done it discredit: he proved himself as decent, decorous, and conscientious, as Peter was rampant, boisterous, and—— (this last epithet I choose to suppress, because it would let the cat out of the bag). He laboured faithfully in the parish: the schools, both Sunday and day-schools, flourished under his sway like green bay-trees. Being human, of course he had his faults; these, however, were proper, steady-going, clerical faults; what many would call virtues: the circumstance of finding himself invited to tea with a dissenter would unhinge him for a week; the spectacle of a Quaker wearing his hat in the church, the thought

of an unbaptised fellow-creature being interred with Christian rites—these things could make strange havoc in Mr Macarthey's physical and mental economy; otherwise he was sane and rational, diligent and charitable.

I doubt not a justice-loving public will have remarked, ere this, that I have thus far shown a criminal remissness in pursuing, catching, and bringing to condign punishment the would-be assassin of Mr Robert Moore: here was a fine opening to lead my willing readers a dance, at once decorous and exciting: a dance of law and gospel, of the dungeon, the dock, and the "dead-thraw." You might have liked it, reader, but *I* should not: I and my subject would presently have quarrelled, and then I should have broken down: I was happy to find that facts perfectly exonerated me from the attempt. The murderer was never punished; for the good reason that he was never caught; the result of the further circumstance that he was never pursued. The magistrates made a shuffling, as if they were going to rise and do valiant things; but, since Moore himself, instead of urging and leading them as heretofore, lay still on his little cottage-couch, laughing in his sleeve and sneering with every feature of his pale, foreign face, they considered better of it; and, after fulfilling certain indispensable forms, prudently resolved to let the matter quietly drop, which they did.

Mr Moore knew who had shot him, and all Briarfield knew; it was no other than Michael Hartley, the half-crazed weaver once before alluded to, a frantic Antinomian in religion, and a mad leveller in politics; the poor soul died of delirium tremens, a year after the attempt on Moore, and Robert gave his wretched widow a guinea to bury him.

The winter is over and gone: spring has followed

with beamy and shadowy, with flowery and showery flight: we are now in the heart of summer—in mid-June,—the June of 1812.

It is burning weather: the air is deep azure and red gold: it fits the time; it fits the age; it fits the present spirit of the nations. The nineteenth century wantons in its giant adolescence: the Titan-boy uproots mountains in his game, and hurls rocks in his wild sport. This summer, Bonaparte is in the saddle: he and his host scour Russian deserts: he has with him Frenchmen and Poles, Italians and children of the Rhine, six hundred thousand strong. He marches on old Moscow: under old Moscow's walls the rude Cossack waits him. Barbarian stoic! he waits without fear of the boundless ruin rolling on. He puts his trust in a snow-cloud: the Wilderness, the Wind, the Hail-Storm are his refuge: his allies are the elements—Air, Fire, Water. And what are these? Three terrible archangels ever stationed before the throne of Jehovah. They stand clothed in white, girdled with golden girdles; they uplift vials, brimming with the wrath of God. Their time is the day of vengeance; their signal, the word of the Lord of Hosts, "thundering with the voice of His excellency."

"Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?

"Go your ways: pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth."

It is done: the earth is scorched with fire: the sea becomes "as the blood of a dead man:" the islands flee away; the mountains are not found.

In this year, Lord Wellington assumed the reins in Spain: they made him Generalissimo, for their own salvation's sake. In this year, he took Badajos, he

fought the field of Vittoria, he captured Pampeluna, he stormed St Sebastian; in this year, he won Salamanca.

Men of Manchester! I beg your pardon for this slight résumé of warlike facts: but it is of no consequence. Lord Wellington is, for you, only a decayed old gentleman now: I rather think some of you have called him a "dotard"—you have taunted him with his age, and the loss of his physical vigour. What fine heroes you are yourselves! Men like you have a right to trample on what is mortal in a demigod. Scoff at your ease—your scorn can never break his grand, old heart.

But come, friends, whether Quakers or Cotton-printers, let us hold a Peace-Congress, and let out our venom quietly. We have been talking with unseemly zeal about bloody battles and butchering generals; we arrive now at a triumph in your line. On the 18th of June 1812, the Orders in Council were repealed, and the blockaded ports thrown open. You know very well—such of you as are old enough to remember—you made Yorkshire and Lancashire shake with your shout on that occasion: the ringers cracked a bell in Briarfield belfry; it is dissonant to this day. The Association of Merchants and Manufacturers dined together at Stilbro', and one and all went home in such a plight as their wives would never wish to witness more. Liverpool started and snorted like a river-horse roused amongst his reeds by thunder. Some of the American merchants felt threatenings of apoplexy, and had themselves bled: all, like wise men, at this first moment of prosperity, prepared to rush into the bowels of speculation, and to delve new difficulties, in whose depths they might lose themselves at some future day. Stocks, which had been accumulating for years, now went off in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; warehouses were lightened, ships were laden; work abounded, wages

rose; the good time seemed come. These prospects might be delusive, but they were brilliant—to some they were even true. At that epoch, in that single month of June, many a solid fortune was realised.

When a whole province rejoices, the humblest of its inhabitants tastes a festal feeling: the sound of public bells rouses the most secluded abode, as if with a call to be gay. And so Caroline Helstone thought, when she dressed herself more carefully than usual on the day of this trading triumph, and went, attired in her neatest muslin, to spend the afternoon at Fieldhead, there to superintend certain millinery preparations for a great event: the last appeal in these matters being reserved for her unimpeachable taste. She decided on the wreath, the veil, the dress to be worn at the altar: she chose various robes and fashions for more ordinary occasions, without much reference to the bride's opinion; that lady, indeed, being in a somewhat impracticable mood.

Louis had presaged difficulties, and he had found them: in fact, his mistress had shown herself exquisitely provoking; putting off her marriage day by day, week by week, month by month. At first coaxing him with soft pretences of procrastination, and in the end rousing his whole deliberate but determined nature to revolt against her tyranny, at once so sweet and so intolerable.

It had needed a sort of tempest-shock to bring her to the point; but there she was at last, fettered to a fixed day: there she lay, conquered by love, and bound with a vow.

Thus vanquished and restricted, she pined, like any other chained denizen of deserts. Her captor alone could cheer her; his society only could make amends

for the lost privilege of liberty: in his absence, she sat or wandered alone; spoke little, and ate less.

She furthered no preparations for her nuptials; Louis was himself obliged to direct all arrangements: he was virtually master of Fieldhead, weeks before he became so nominally: the least presumptuous, the kindest master that ever was; but with his lady absolute. She abdicated without a word or a struggle. "Go to Mr Moore; ask Mr Moore," was her answer when applied to for orders. Never was wooer of wealthy bride so thoroughly absorbed from the subaltern part; so inevitably compelled to assume a paramount character.

In all this, Miss Keeldar partly yielded to her disposition; but a remark she made a year afterwards proved that she partly also acted on system. "Louis," she said, "would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern: the incapacity of the sovereign had developed the powers of the premier."

It had been intended that Miss Helstone should act as bridesmaid at the approaching nuptials; but Fortune had destined her another part.

She came home in time to water her plants. She had performed this little task. The last flower attended to was a rose-tree, which bloomed in a quiet green nook at the back of the house. This plant had received the refreshing shower: she was now resting a minute. Near the wall stood a fragment of sculptured stone—a monkish relic; once, perhaps, the base of a cross: she mounted it, that she might better command the view. She had still the watering-pot in one hand; with the other, her pretty dress was held lightly aside, to avoid trickling drops: she gazed over the wall, along some lonely fields; beyond three dusk trees, rising side by side against the sky; beyond a solitary thorn, at the head of a solitary lane far off: she surveyed the dusk moors, where bonfires were kindling: the summer-

evening was warm; the bell-music was joyous; the blue smoke of the fires looked soft; their red flame bright; above them, in the sky whence the sun had vanished, twinkled a silver point — the Star of Love.

Caroline was not unhappy that evening; far otherwise: but as she gazed she sighed, and as she sighed a hand circled her, and rested quietly on her waist. Caroline thought she knew who had drawn near: she received the touch unstartled.

"I am looking at Venus, mamma: see, she is beautiful. How white her lustre is, compared with the deep red of the bonfires!"

The answer was a closer caress; and Caroline turned, and looked, not into Mrs Pryor's matron face, but up at a dark manly visage. She dropped her watering-pot, and stepped down from the pedestal.

"I have been sitting with 'mamma' an hour," said the intruder. "I have had a long conversation with her. Where, meantime, have you been?"

"To Fieldhead. Shirley is as naughty as ever, Robert: she will neither say Yes nor No to any question put. She sits alone: I cannot tell whether she is melancholy or nonchalant: if you rouse her, or scold her, she gives you a look half wistful, half reckless, which sends you away as queer and crazed as herself. What Louis will make of her, I cannot tell: for my part, if I were a gentleman, I think I would not dare undertake her."

"Never mind them: they were cut out for each other. Louis, strange to say, likes her all the better for these freaks: he will manage her, if any one can. She tries him, however: he has had a stormy courtship for such a calm character; but you see it all ends in victory for him. Caroline, I have sought you to ask an audience. Why are those bells ringing?"

"For the repeal of your terrible law; the Orders you hate so much. You are pleased, are you not?"

"Yesterday evening at this time, I was packing some books for a sea-voyage: they were the only possessions, except some clothes, seeds, roots, and tools, which I felt free to take with me to Canada. I was going to leave you."

"To leave me? To leave *me?*"

Her little fingers fastened on his arm: she spoke and looked affrighted.

"Not now—not now. Examine my face; yes, look at me well; is the despair of parting legible thereon?"

She looked into an illuminated countenance, whose characters were all beaming, though the page itself was dusk: this face, potent in the majesty of its traits, shed down on her hope, fondness, delight.

"Will the repeal do you good; *much* good—*immediate* good?" she inquired.

"The repeal of the Orders in Council saves me. Now I shall not turn bankrupt; now I shall not give up business; now I shall not leave England; now I shall be no longer poor; now I can pay my debts; now all the cloth I have in my warehouses will be taken off my hands, and commissions given me for much more; this day lays for my fortunes abroad, firm foundation; on which, for the first time in my life, I can securely build."

Caroline devoured his words: she held his hand in hers; she drew a long breath.

"You are saved? Your heavy difficulties are lifted?"

"They are lifted: I breathe: I can act."

"At last! Oh! Providence is kind. Thank Him, Robert."

"I do thank Providence."

"And I also, for your sake!" She looked up devoutly.

"Now, I can take more workmen; give better wages; lay wiser and more liberal plans; do some good; be less selfish: *now*, Caroline, I can have a house —a home which I can truly call mine—and *now*"——

He paused; for his deep voice was checked.

"And *now*," he resumed—"now I can think of marriage, *now* I can seek a wife."

This was no moment for her to speak: she did not speak.

"Will Caroline, who meekly hopes to be forgiven as she forgives—will she pardon all I have made her suffer —all that long pain I have wickedly caused her—all that sickness of body and mind she owed to me? Will she forget what she knows of my poor ambition—my sordid schemes? Will she let me expiate these things? Will she suffer me to prove that, as I once deserted cruelly, trifled wantonly, injured basely, I can now love faithfully, cherish fondly, treasure tenderly?"

His hand was in Caroline's still: a gentle pressure answered him.

"Is Caroline mine?"

"Caroline is yours."

"I will prize her: the sense of her value is here, in my heart; the necessity for her society is blended with my life: not more jealous shall I be of the blood whose flow moves my pulses, than of her happiness and well-being."

"I love you, too, Robert, and will take faithful care of you."

"Will you take faithful care of me?—faithful care! as if that rose should promise to shelter from tempest this hard, grey stone? But she *will* care for me, in her way: these hands will be the gentle ministrants of every comfort I can taste. I know the being I seek to entwine

with my own will bring me a solace—a charity—a purity—to which, of myself, I am a stranger."

Suddenly, Caroline was troubled; her lip quivered.

"What flutters my dove?" asked Moore, as she nestled to, and then uneasily shrank from him.

"Poor mamma! I am all mamma has: must I leave her?"

"Do you know, I thought of that difficulty: I and 'mamma' have discussed it."

"Tell me what you wish—what you would like—and I will consider if it is possible to consent; but I cannot desert her, even for you: I cannot break her heart, even for your sake."

"She was faithful when I was false—was she not? I never came near your sick-bed, and she watched it ceaselessly."

"What must I do? Anything but leave her."

"At my wish, you never shall leave her."

"She may live very near us?"

"With us—only she will have her own rooms and servant: for this she stipulates herself."

"You know she has an income, that, with her habits, makes her quite independent?"

"She told me that, with a gentle pride that reminded me of somebody else."

"She is not at all interfering, and incapable of gossip."

"I know her, Cary: but if—instead of being the personification of reserve and discretion—she were something quite opposite, I should not fear her."

"Yet she will be your mother-in-law?" The speaker gave an arch little nod: Moore smiled.

"Louis and I are not of the order of men who fear their mothers-in-law, Cary: our foes never have been, nor will be, those of our own household. I doubt not, my mother-in-law will make much of me."

"That she will—in her quiet way, you know. She is not demonstrative; and when you see her silent, or even cool, you must not fancy her displeased—it is only a manner she has. Be sure to let me interpret for her, whenever she puzzles you; always believe my account of the matter, Robert."

"Oh, implicitly! Jesting apart, I feel that she and I will suit—on ne peut mieux. Hortense, you know, is exquisitely susceptible—in our French sense of the word—and not, perhaps, always reasonable in her requirements; yet—dear, honest girl—I never painfully wounded her feelings, or had a serious quarrel with her, in my life."

"No: you are most generously considerate—indeed, most tenderly indulgent to her; and you will be considerate with mamma. You are a gentleman all through, to the bone, and nowhere so perfect a gentleman as at your own fireside."

"An eulogium I like: it is very sweet. I am well pleased my Caroline should view me in this light."

"Mamma just thinks of you as I do."

"Not quite, I hope?"

"She does not want to marry you—don't be vain; but she said to me the other day, 'My dear, Mr Moore has pleasing manners; he is one of the few gentlemen I have seen who combine politeness with an air of sincerity.'"

"'Mamma' is rather a misanthropist, is she not? Not the best opinion of the sterner sex?"

"She forbears to judge them as a whole, but she has her exceptions whom she admires. Louis and Mr Hall, and, of late—yourself. She did not like you once: I knew that because she would never speak of you. But, Robert"——

"Well, what now? What is the new thought?"

"You have not seen my uncle yet?"

"I have: 'mamma' called him into the room. He consents conditionally: if I prove that I can keep a wife, I may have her; and I *can* keep her better than he thinks—better than I choose to boast."

"If you get rich, you will do good with your money, Robert?"

"I *will* do good; you shall tell me how: indeed, I have some schemes of my own, which you and I will talk about on our own hearth one day. I have seen the necessity of doing good: I have learned the downright folly of being selfish. Caroline, I foresee what I will now foretell. This war *must* ere long draw to a close: Trade is likely to prosper for some years to come: there may be a brief misunderstanding between England and America, but that will not last. What would you think if, one day—perhaps ere another ten years elapse—Louis and I divide Briarfield parish betwixt us? Louis, at any rate, is certain of power and property: he will not bury his talents: he is a benevolent fellow, and has, besides, an intellect of his own of no trifling calibre. His mind is slow but strong: it must work: it may work deliberately, but it will work well. He will be made magistrate of the district—Shirley says he shall: she would proceed impetuously and prematurely to obtain for him this dignity, if he would let her, but he will not; as usual, he will be in no haste: ere he has been master of Fieldhead a year, all the district will feel his quiet influence, and acknowledge his unassuming superiority: a magistrate is wanted—they will, in time, invest him with the office voluntarily and unreluctantly. Everybody admires his future wife: and everybody will, in time, like him: he is of the 'pâte' generally approved, 'bon comme le pain'—daily bread for the most fastidious; good for the infant and the aged, nourishing for the poor, wholesome for the rich. Shirley, in spite of her whims and

oddities, her dodges and delays, has an infatuated fondness for him: she will one day see him as universally beloved as even *she* could wish: he will also be universally esteemed, considered, consulted, depended on—too much so: his advice will be always judicious, his help always good-natured—ere long, both will be in inconvenient request: he will have to impose restrictions. As for me, if I succeed as I intend to do, my success will add to his and Shirley's income: I can double the value of their mill-property: I can line yonder barren Hollow with lines of cottages, and rows of cottage-gardens "——

"Robert? And root up the copse?"

"The copse shall be firewood ere five years elapse: the beautiful wild ravine shall be a smooth descent; the green natural terrace shall be a paved street: there shall be cottages in the dark ravine, and cottages on the lonely slopes: the rough pebbled track shall be an even, firm, broad, black, sooty road, bedded with the cinders from my mill: and my mill, Caroline—my mill shall fill its present yard."

"Horrible! You will change our blue hill-country air into the Stilbro' smoke atmosphere."

"I will pour the waters of Pactolus through the valley of Briarfield."

"I like the beck a thousand times better."

"I will get an act for enclosing Nunnely Common, and parcelling it out into farms."

"Stilbro' Moor, however, defies you, thank Heaven! What can you grow in Bilberry Moss? What will flourish on Rushedge?"

"Caroline, the houseless, the starving, the unemployed, shall come to Hollow's Mill from far and near; and Joe Scott shall give them work, and Louis Moore, Esq., shall let them a tenement, and Mrs Gill shall mete them a portion till the first pay-day."

She smiled up in his face.

"Such a Sunday-school as you will have, Cary! such collections as you will get! such a day school as you and Shirley, and Miss Ainley, will have to manage between you! The mill shall find salaries for a master and mistress, and the Squire or the Clothier shall give a treat once a quarter."

She mutely offered a kiss, an offer taken unfair advantage of, to the extortion of about a hundred kisses.

"Extravagant day-dreams!" said Moore, with a sigh and smile, "yet perhaps we may realise some of them. Meantime, the dew is falling: Mrs Moore, I shall take you in."

It is August: the bells clash out again, not only through Yorkshire but through England: from Spain, the voice of a trumpet has sounded long: it now waxes louder and louder; it proclaims Salamanca won. This night is Briarfield to be illuminated. On this day the Fieldhead tenantry dine together; the Hollow's Mill workpeople will be assembled for a like festal purpose; the schools have a grand treat. This morning there were two marriages solemnised in Briarfield church.—Louis Gérard Moore, Esq., late of Antwerp, to Shirley, daughter of the late Charles Cave Keeldar, Esq., of Fieldhead. Robert Gérard Moore, Esq., of Hollow's Mill, to Caroline, niece of the Rev. Matthewson Helstone, M.A., Rector of Briarfield.

The ceremony, in the first instance, was performed by Mr Helstone; Hiram Yorke, Esq., of Briarmains, giving the bride away. In the second instance, Mr Hall, Vicar of Nunnely, officiated. Amongst the bridal train, the two most noticeable personages were the youthful bridesmen, Henry Sympson, and Martin Yorke.

I suppose Robert Moore's prophecies were, partially, at least, fulfilled. The other day I passed up the Hollow, which tradition says was once green, and lone, and wild; and there I saw the manufacturer's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes—the cinder-black highway, the cottages, and the cottage gardens; there I saw a mighty mill, and a chimney, ambitious as the tower of Babel. I told my old housekeeper when I came home where I had been.

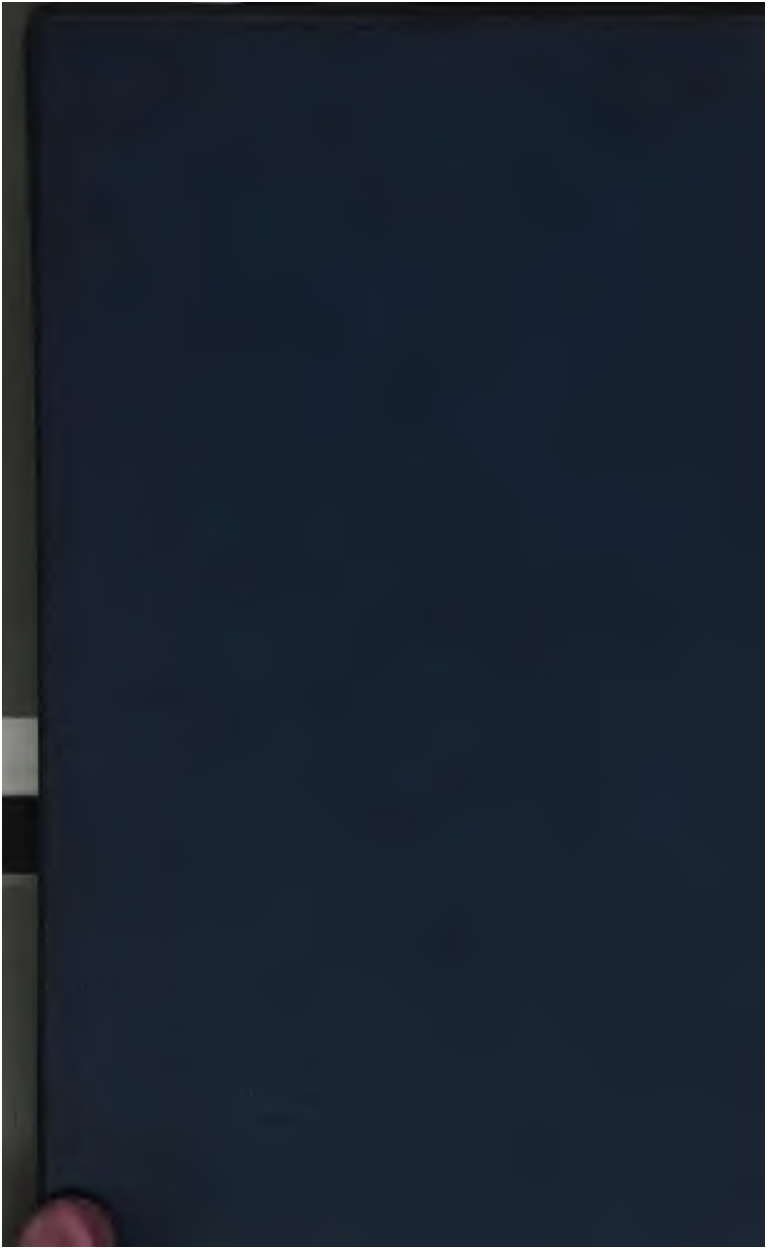
"Ay!" said she; "this world has queer changes. I can remember the old mill being built—the very first it was in all the district; and then, I can remember it being pulled down, and going with my lake-lasses (companions) to see the foundation-stone of the new one laid: the two Mr Moores made a great stir about it; they were there, and a deal of fine folk beside, and both their ladies; very bonnie and grand they looked; but Mrs Louis was the grandest, she always wore such handsome dresses: Mrs Robert was quieter like. Mrs Louis smiled when she talked: she had a real, happy, glad, good-natured look; but she had een that pierced a body through: there is no such ladies now-a-days."

"What was the Hollow like then, Martha?"

"Different to what it is now; but I can tell of it clean different again: when there was neither mill, nor cot, nor hall, except Fieldhead, within two miles of it. I can tell, one summer evening, fifty years syne, my mother coming running in just at the edge of dark, almost fleyed out of her wits, saying she had seen a fairish (fairy) in Fieldhead Hollow; and that was the last fairish that ever was seen on this country side (though they've been heard within these forty years). A lonesome spot it was—and a bonnie spot

—full of oak trees and nut trees. It is altered now."

The story is told. I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in the quest!

FINIS.

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